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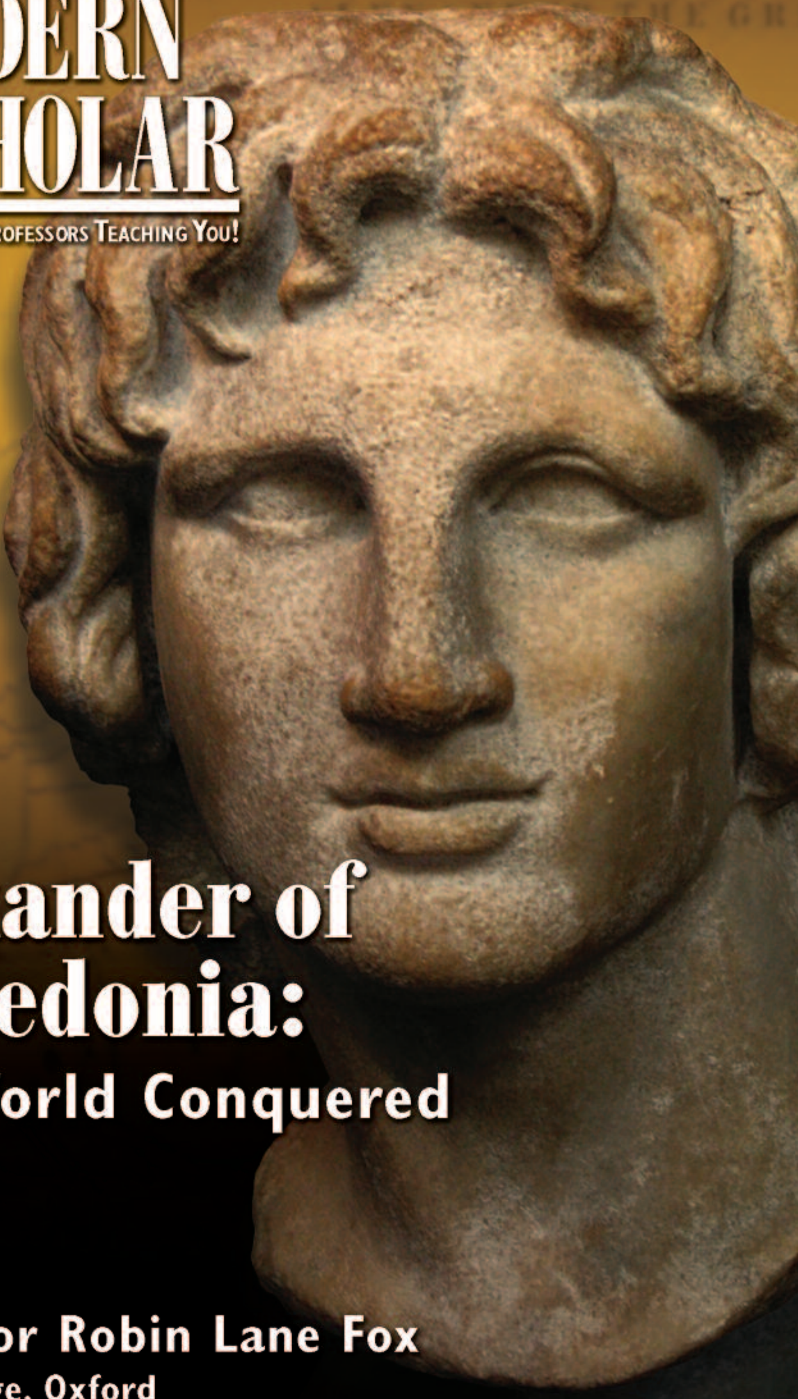

Alexander of Macedonia:

The World Conquered

Professor Robin Lane Fox
New College, Oxford

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Professor Robin Lane Fox

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Cover image: Marble bust of Alexander the Great believed to be from
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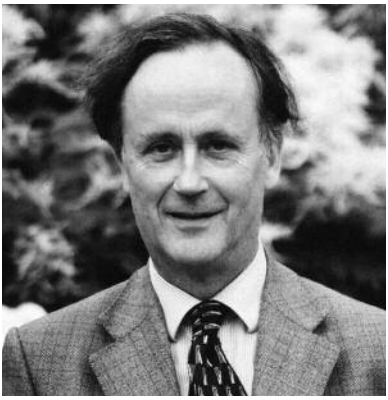

Photo courtesy of Robin Lane Fox

About Your Professor

Robin Lane Fox

Robin Lane Fox has been a Fellow and Tutor in Ancient History at New College, Oxford, since 1977 and University Reader in Ancient History at Oxford University since 1990. He was the main historical advisor to Oliver Stone on his film *Alexander*, and he took part in many of its most dramatic reenactments.

Professor Fox has written extensively on Alexander the Great, including *Alexander the Great* (Penguin, 2004 [1973]) and *The Search for Alexander* (Little, Brown, 1980). Other books by Professor Fox include *Unauthorized Version: Truth and Fiction in the Bible* (Vintage, 1993), *The Long March: Xenophon and the Ten Thousand* (Yale University Press, 2004), *Pagans and Christians* (Penguin, 2006), *The Classical World: An Epic History from Homer to Hadrian* (Basic Books, 2008), and *Travelling Heroes: In the Epic Age of Homer* (Knopf, 2009).

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MAP OF
THE EMPIRE OF
ALEXANDER THE GREAT

Introduction

Alexander the Great is the most famous king and conqueror known in the ancient world. He subdued the lands from Egypt to northwest India, and when he died he was many thousand times richer than anyone known in the Greek world. In his lifetime, he was given honors equal to those of the gods. After his death, he became a legend invoked by his aspiring Successors and became known to posterity in an increasingly fabulous account of his life and achievements, the "Alexander Romance" that was to become the best-selling fiction of the medieval world and was translated into languages throughout Europe and the Near East.

When he was born, in 356 BC, it would have seemed incredible that his kingdom of Macedon in northern Greece could ever have ruled the Greek world, let alone the Persian Empire, which had dominated the world of Asia for nearly two hundred years. When he died in Babylon in June 323 he was only thirty-two, but he had overthrown the entire Persian Empire and was planning conquests that would go beyond any the Persian king had achieved. His story is not only the story of history's most extraordinary young king. It is the story of a kingdom thrown suddenly onto the world stage with consequences for people never previously accustomed to ruling beyond their home valleys and plains, let alone over thousands of square miles in which nobody even spoke their Greek language.

Why did Alexander succeed? What was he like? Did he change the world and its history? These questions are among those that these lectures will address, but there are also the profound questions about our own knowledge of this period and our interpretations of it. Why are so many books written still about Alexander and why is his history so hotly debated? These lectures dwell on these questions too and add examples where recently found evidence increases our knowledge and all the problems that come with it. They also try to set the terms for assessing Alexander both in ancient and modern controversy. How did his army work? How far were his great battles planned? How did his relationship with his men change? What did he owe to previous methods of government and their prominent figures? Is it right to see him as the founder of a new age?

His thirty-two years span so many cultures—Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, and even Indian, so hazily known to the Greeks. His court and army look so very different at the end of his life, and it is the aim of this series to give listeners a sense of the epic events and ideals by which Alexander lived and also the distance that he and his men had come in only thirteen years, both physically as soldiers and mentally as conquerors of an unimagined new world.

Lecture 1

Perspective and Sources

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Robin Lane Fox's *Alexander the Great*.

Alexander is considered the greatest king and conqueror in the history of the ancient world—and many would say in the entire history of the world.

The Spell of Youth

Alexander was born in northern Greece in the kingdom of Macedon in the month of July 356 BC. His was a small, vulnerable kingdom that was the playground of its barbarian neighbors and of the Greek city-states. Beyond him to the east had stretched for two hundred years the great Persian empire, ruling from the borders of Egypt to what then was northwest India (Pakistan today). No Macedonian had seen into Asia—the life was simple and hard in the Macedonian hill kingdom, hunting, keeping alive, guarding the sheep in tiny village centers.

Alexander died, it is thought, on June 11 in 323 BC, age thirty-two. Part of his magic is unquestionably the image of youth, the spell of the amazingly brave man who overthrew the great kingdoms of the world when he was only twenty-four or twenty-five, and who was far richer than any contemporary.

By the end of Alexander's life, he had conquered from the borders of Libya out to northwest India. He was worshiped in the Greek world and paid honors fit for a god. His conquests mark the beginning of what is called the Hellenistic Age. Alexander had completely changed the geographic horizons of the Greek-ruled territories. For the first time, Greeks found themselves administering an empire in which people were not Greeks and didn't even speak their language.

Alexander was never defeated in a pitched battle. He led his men from the front, and his army eventually numbered more than one hundred thousand men.

> *Just after Philip had taken Potidaea, he received these three messages at one time, that Parmenio had overthrown the Illyrians in a great battle, that his race-horse had won the course at the Olympic games, and that his wife had given birth to Alexander; with which being naturally well pleased, as an addition to his satisfaction, he was assured by the diviners that a son, whose birth was accompanied with three such successes, could not fail of being invincible.*
>
> ~Plutarch
> *Life of Alexander*

When he died, his notes were read out to his troops. They were said to include conquering right on westwards, at least out to the Atlantic. He was credited with the idea that he would exchange people between Europe and Asia so that by intermarriage and acts of kinship they should be brought into concord and friendship.

A Different World

Many modern scholars have reduced Alexander to just an army commander. This is somewhat understandable in the context of men such as Hitler or Stalin or Mao, who raise questions as to the desirability of people with grand programs for territorial conquest. But Alexander's world was not the modern world, nor were its general values.

Alexander was born a king—not like Hitler or Mao or someone who overthrew an existing social order. He ruled by right and by birth, and he led his men himself in battle, heroically, frequently wounded, amazingly fit.

In antiquity, nobody blamed him, among his historians, for killing so many of those who lined up against him when he invaded India. Rather, his victories there, if anything, were represented as glorious.

His invasion of Asia and the Persian empire was promoted by him and by his father Philip as revenge and punishment of the Persians for their previous sacrileges and their misdeeds in Greece. Its aim, they said, was partly to liberate the Greek cities under Persian rule.

Alexander was a great founder of new cities, as many as sixteen, and above all the famous Alexandria in Egypt that still bears his name. What was the point in founding these cities and what too is the measure of the values that he presents to his men—concord and harmony between the Macedonians and the Persians? What was he planning? What was his vision?

The Sources

In antiquity there were collections of what were supposed to be Alexander's letters. But it is clear that they were fakes, and some passed into later histories.

There are no genuine private letters from Alexander, none of his speeches in his own words. There are, though, texts inscribed with rulings from Alexander by Greek cities and letters on official matters.

The main narrative histories of Alexander were compiled by later authorities who never knew him, but there are long, detailed accounts, and they rely on other, lost histories written by people much closer to Alexander.

Diodorus's abbreviated Book 17 is given over to Alexander's expedition. A problem is that Diodorus was only an abbreviator, and he was extremely incompetent.

Many people, rightly, would turn to *The Expedition of Alexander* by Arrian, in seven complete books. It is a work of some authority and penetration. Arrian based his writing on accounts of two contemporaries who had served with Alexander, and Arrian himself was a military man, born in a Greek-speaking town in northwest Turkey. Arrian rose high in Roman service under the emperors of the 120s, possibly to the 160s AD. He had become a Roman governor under Hadrian, and he wrote his work on Alexander, some think, in the 130s, but perhaps as late as the 150s AD. It is still the best source. Even so, it must be used with some caution.

The most attractive source might be the Greek author Plutarch, who wrote "parallel lives" of great figures from antiquity and who paired Alexander with Roman near-equal Julius Caesar. Plutarch's *Life of Alexander*, written around 100 AD, used many different sources and presented a characterized portrait of Alexander.

One danger is that Plutarch draws on letters of Alexander, and these were actually fakes. He quotes, though, letters from other sources that could be genuine. The second problem is that Plutarch was far removed from the values and world of the Macedonian Greeks whose lives he narrated, and he had a tendency to inject his own moral values—so one is well advised to take his judgments with a grain of salt, to not trust in his letters, and to be wary of unascribed anecdotes.

Alexander himself employed a court historian and hired a kinsman of Aristotle called Callisthenes, an important figure who was with Alexander until at least 327 BC, and who wrote and published a book called *The Deeds of Alexander*. The aim was likely to present Alexander to the Greek world as Alexander wished to be seen. He was an important early source for Plutarch, and it is clear from his training with Aristotle that Callisthenes was a scholarly man.

There are bits of Callisthenes, very few, quoted in Plutarch—and they are precious.

There was also once held, now lost in total, the work of Alexander's boyhood friend Nearchus, a Cretan man of the sea who ended up as the admiral of Alexander's fleet, and a man who knew Alexander well. Nearchus passed occasional personal judgments on Alexander. He wrote within seven years of Alexander's death, but only bits and pieces of him survive.

Equally valuable are the sources on whom Arrian mainly relied. One is a man called Aristobulus, who settled eventually in eastern Macedon but served throughout with Alexander and was given various commissions by Alexander. Aristobulus did not write until twenty-five years or more after Alexander's death, and he is defensive of matters that had become disputed, the most famous being Alexander's drinking habits.

Immensely important, perhaps the most important source for Arrian, was Alexander's boyhood friend, the future pharaoh of Egypt, Ptolemy. He wrote a history, but this was written late as well.

There was also a fellow naval officer, perhaps writing before Nearchus, called Onesicritus, and he was stunningly inaccurate.

There are also hints of an important work from a Greek, Chares, from the island of Lesbos. He is quoted sometimes for details and can be valuable.

There is a puzzling entity known as the Royal Diaries, ascribed to Alexander's secretary, the Greek Eumenes, and to a puzzling figure, Diodotus, who might have been in the employ of Alexander's viceroy in Macedon, Antipater. About seventy years ago, many felt the diaries were a day-by-day record of what happened on Alexander's march. Scholars have picked over this and it may even be that the diaries were a work of propaganda, their main purpose to refute the charge that Alexander had been poisoned.

Another strand of tradition may have been the first long Alexander history, ascribed to an enigmatic figure named Cleitarchus, whose father had been a historian of the Persian empire. The importance of it is that this work is what Diodorus used in his Book 17 on Alexander, and probably it was the ultimate source for the Roman Quintus Curtius, writing in perhaps the 70s AD. Scholars class this bundle of information together under the general blanket term "Vulgate." Quite frequently it differs from what is found in Arrian, and it is sensational in tone.

In 2007, fragments of a papyrus, whose author was writing an assessment of the historians of Alexander and the generations after, was published for the first time. It seemed to give a date to Cleitarchus, which seemed to be about 250 to 230 BC, at least sixty, seventy, eighty years later than thought—and if he is so late in date, one must be wary.

Historians compare contrasting sources, rather like the work being performed on the Gospel sources. They must be compared bit by bit, and after years it seems there is a danger of missing the wood for the trees. If one reads the Vulgate through and sees so much that is demonstrably wrong, then it cannot be trusted, simply because it differs from Arrian. At times, perhaps, it can be used as a supplement.

History is never simple. There is no one true version in a wide-ranging, interpretive sense—and least of all is the history of Alexander so simple.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What is the danger of applying modern sensibilities to the study of Alexander?
2. In relation to the sources, what are the reasons that Alexander scholarship is so complicated?

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Pothos.org is a website dedicated to Alexander the Great. —
http://www.pothos.org

Lecture 2

Alexander's Youth in Philip's Kingdom

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Robin Lane Fox's *Alexander the Great*.

Alexander was born in July 356 BC, the son of King Philip, the reigning king of the Macedonians, and of Olympias, Philip's bride from the adjacent Greek kingdom of Epirus, one of four brides Philip had married.

A Balance of Weakness

To the south of Macedon, the Greek states had fought themselves into an uneasy "balance of weakness." Athens lacked the money and fleet to dominate the rest of the Greek world. Sparta, crippled by a recent invasion from the Theban Greeks, was no longer able to dominate. The Thebans, who might have come out on top and whose power had been considerable over the previous ten years, also lacked the strength to dominate.

So there were three strong polis lead powers, but they were somewhat shadows of their former selves.

To the north, a vast area was occupied by the Thessalians in what is called Thessaly. They were fractured by internal divisions, social conflict, and difficulties between various towns and alternative factions within the general Thessalian area. They were potentially powerful, but not seriously so.

Macedon was not in better condition, and nobody would have believed that in twenty years, this small, fractured kingdom would dominate the great Greek states of history in the south of the Greek world.

When Alexander was born, there were great names still active: it was the beginning of the career of Demosthenes and there was Aristotle, the pupil of Plato.

Across the Aegean, down the western coast of what is now Turkey, where the Greeks had long been settled, the Greek cities in that part of the world had been conceded to the rule of the Persian empire.

The Persian empire was the major fact of life east of Macedon in the years when Alexander was growing up. It had existed for two hundred years, and no one could have imagined that it could be overthrown. Egypt did rebel. Cyprus rebelled, and there were other revolts, but the Persian empire was vastly richer than Greece and had greater strength of manpower at its disposal.

Macedon was by origin a lowland kingdom, set in the great plains watered by the big rivers in the land to the north of Mt. Olympus. Today, one could visit two great capital centers there: Pella and Aigai.

Onto this lowland core were attached to varying degrees of loyalty individual hill kingdoms ruled by local nobles and kings to the west and northwest. These hill kingdoms included little village centers that were the homes of Alexander's future famous officers.

These were amazingly bleak, underurbanized centers, with perhaps just one royal township in each of them.

The Father

Philip had come to power in 360 to 359 BC, a man in his early twenties, and he inherited a lowland kingdom in total chaos. It had been overrun by barbarian neighbors, and the king had been killed in battle. It seemed to have little chance of pulling through as an independent source.

But, amazingly, over twenty years, Philip restabilized it. He reshaped the entire social order, altered the army, enlarged the boundaries, and turned it into a major power.

Philip might be the most underestimated man in antiquity. Unfortunately, Plutarch did not write his life. The historians who wrote of him often wrote slander and abuse. It is difficult to work back to a true picture.

A contemporary Greek visitor, Theopompus, described him as "a man such as Europe had never born." And yet he described him as being drunk, extravagant with his money, and sexually promiscuous—so the statement could certainly be seen as a double-edged compliment. And of course the comments of Greek outsiders at risk of Philip's power were more than likely to be somewhat hostile.

Were the Macedonians really Greeks? Nowadays, still, this question is highly politicized because of the disputes between Greece in the north and to the west of it the republic in the former area of Yugoslavia, which claims the Macedonian name for itself. Certainly, the Macedonian kings claimed a chain of Greek descent, and the version accepted by the poets from early on was that the legendary founding hero had indeed been a son of the Greek god Zeus.

The earlier king, Alexander I, was allowed to compete in the Greek Olympics. There is no doubt about the heavily Greek cultural package, Greek style, and the Greek magnificence intensified in Philip's patronage of artists and poets.

Macedonians did speak a Macedonian dialect, which outsiders, Greeks from the south, found hard to understand. Intensive study of the roots and derivatives of Macedonian personal names—for

© Photos.com/Archaeological Museum Salonica

Fourth-century BC carved ivory mask of Philip II found in royal tombs at Vergina, Greece.

instance, the month names—has put beyond doubt that the Macedonian dialect closely resembled the sort of Greek spoken in the northwest of the Greek world—what would be on the southwest of the Macedonian hill borders. The Macedonian dialect was Greek in root but hard for an Athenian to understand. It had been noted by outsiders, such as the historian Thucydides, who seemed to divide Macedonians from Hellenes.

Unquestionably, Alexander spoke Greek. He knew the Macedonian dialect. From the increasing number of inscriptions found on epitaphs of families and individuals in the lowland Greek world it can be seen that they had Greek names and Greek origin. It might be said that they were a little behind the developed Greek dialects and speech and civic life in the south, even at this stage. They also from time to time regarded themselves, as they became powerful, as a special group—the Macedonians, in contrast to the Hellenes, which doesn't mean, however, that they were not Hellenes.

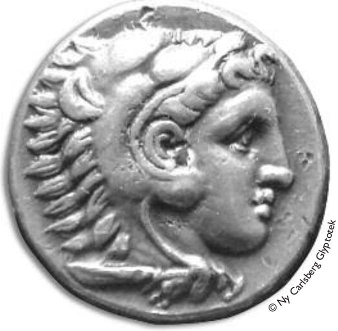
It is striking that the Macedonian kings had several wives at once. They were polygamists in a way ordinary Greeks never were, and this had only been seen in the Greek world in the time of the Tyrannoi, the tyrants. There were reasons of state and politics for why the kings had so many wives. It was to piece together loyalties with surrounding kingdoms. Macedon grew by becoming what is called a composite monarchy, a patchwork.

The young Alexander was born with a Greek mother and Greek father, speaking Greek in a Macedonian dialect up in a kingdom whose future seemed extremely shaky. But thanks to his father's genius, the armies were recharged and society reorganized—and the outlying surrounding kinglets saw their interests tied into joining the court and sharing Philip's ambitions.

Images of Alexander

The best impressions of Alexander are from the coins issued by his successors, which give the familiar, wonderfully idealized picture of Alexander with strong jaw, straight nose, wide eyes, and the swept-back hair known in archaeological circles as the cowlick look—and an impression, often, of considerable beauty.

There are hints that he wasn't very tall. It is not certain that Alexander was small, but one would probably say relatively short—though extremely strong. The most famous picture now survives in the archaeological museum in Naples, the famous Alexander mosaic, a copy of a lost Greek painting. Here Alexander goes into battle, programmatically wearing no helmet, against the Persian king, and famously he has large brown eyes. Recently it has been argued that the brown eyes were placed in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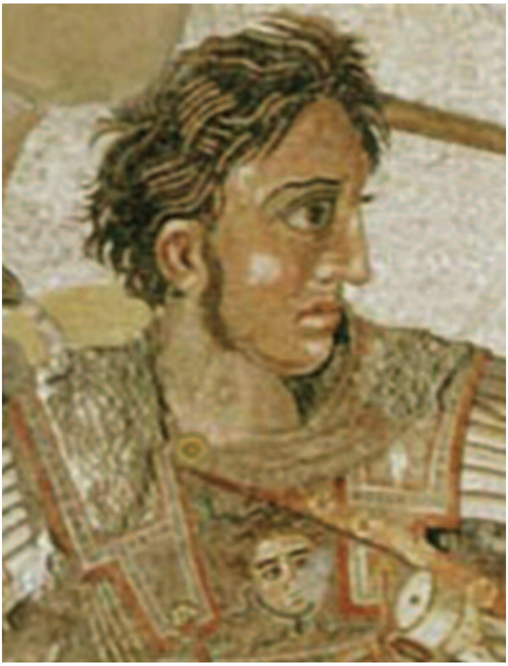
A silver tetradrachm coin bearing the likeness of Alexander the Great and purportedly authorized by him during his lifetime.

the mosaic at a later point, replacing eyes of another color. But the portrait with the long hair and straight nose is perhaps the best impression.

Alexander was famous for trying to control his image, and he used the great court artists to represent himself to the Greek world.



© The Art Archive/Musée Archéologique Naples/Alfredo Dagli Orti

Detail of Alexander from a Roman mosaic discovered in the House of the Faun, Pompeii, and which depicts the Battle of Issus between Alexander and Achaemenid King Darius III.

The Early Years

As Alexander grew up, his father was frequently away, campaigning, stretching his power down into central Greece, the major concerns also conquering the lands on Macedon's eastern border, enlarging the kingdom, resettling Macedonians on the eastern borders, the whole time increasing Macedonians' manpower and their access to the immensely valuable mines of gold and silver.

It has been told that Alexander had an early tutor, Lysimachus, from whom he received the nickname Achilles, which would be enormously important to Alexander's personality.

Alexander would have been, presumably, in the care of his mother, Olympias. From what is known she might have been quarrelsome, of a sharp tongue. When one looks at her activities against her rivals, particularly after Alexander's death, she might not be viewed exactly as a woman driven only by the milk of human kindness.

In the beginning of Plutarch's *Life*, famously, it is told that Olympias kept pet snakes, associated for her partly with the cult of Dionysus, the Greek god of wildness. Indeed, some even wondered if Alexander himself was said to be the child of one of Olympias's snakes.

Olympias was a concerned worshiper of the gods. She was devoted, pious, and passionate, and the cult of Dionysus was very important for her. She lived in a palace, so all sorts of gossip swirled around in what would have been the equivalent of tabloid newspapers.

While Alexander was growing up, Philip set a strong example of a military commander, a man who really thought about the balance of weaponry, the nature of an army. He was extremely tough and extremely clever as a diplomat.

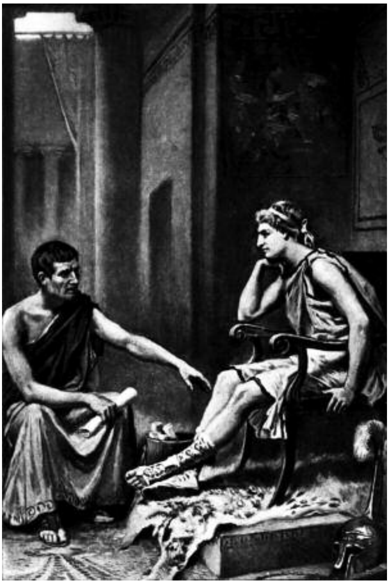
In the year (probably) 345, with Alexander only ten, Philip was approached during his time in Macedon by a horse dealer from the south in Thessaly with a particularly awkward horse, an animal no one could ride, because it kept shying away.

The young Alexander is said to have told Philip, "I will ride him." Philip said that if he could, he would give the horse to the boy. Alexander triumphantly mounted the horse, stamped with an ox as branding, therefore known as "Ox-head"—no saddle, no stirrups. Philip hailed him as a real king who could rule one day, and he gave Alexander the horse. Little did either know the horse would end up dying in northwest India, and Alexander, devoted to it, would even found a city in the horse's honor.

The next hint that the boy was exceptional is that he was given an exceptional tutor, Aristotle. Here was the future greatest man in the world being educated by inarguably the most widely informed intelligence in the whole of the ancient world.

Aristotle taught at a sheltered site called Mieza. There Aristotle taught Alexander, princes, and a group Philip had started called the "Royal pages." The pages were the sons of the nobles, some living in related parts of the composite kingdom, putting them—also useful hostages—in touch with a far wider world than they had ever known.

They must have studied something about geography and the shape of the world as then understood. And also, clearly, Alexander and Aristotle worked on Homer and the *Iliad*, and Aristotle prepared a special edition of the *Iliad* for Alexander, who treasured this edition.


Public Domain

An illustration depicting Aristotle tutoring Alexander from an early twentieth-century history textbook.

Homer was exceptionally important in Alexander's personality, and it is notable that as a boy Alexander was already studying the great poet under the tutelage of the greatest mind in Greece. And Alexander also strongly identified with the great hero of the *Iliad*: passionate, unrelenting Achilles.

A rivalry with the Homeric poems was not irrelevant or a fantasy in the world of Macedonia, which had no fixed constitution. Similar values led to glory and survival for the king of Macedonia, even in the fourth century.

Alexander grew up trained in battle, trained in war, and at age sixteen, he led forces in a campaign in Thrace (modern Bulgaria) in 340. After victory, he was allowed by Philip to found the first of the cities that would bear his name—Alexandropolis (the location is unclear, but it isn't likely at the site of the modern Alexandropolis).

Two years later, in 338, Philip's army came south to fight the opposition that he had provoked in the southern Greek states and on the battlefield. At the Chaeronea, not far from Thebes, Alexander led the winning cavalry charge down one of the wings into the assembled Athenian and Theban forces, and he was victorious.

As a page and prince, Alexander had listened to endless discussions of tactics, military planning, and so much else.

A New King

Philip planned the invasion of Asia. How far he meant to invade the Asian continent, beginning with the Turkish coast, might never be known. But as he began to act on his plan, something fatal happened. In his early forties, he had a midlife crisis. He married yet again, probably in 337, this time to the young Cleopatra, the child of a Macedonian noble within his own circle, the niece of his Macedonian courtier, Attalus.

Plutarch's *Life*, chapter nine, details the story of the great quarrel at Philip's wedding, when Attalus stood up and prayed in public for a legitimate Macedonian successor to Philip, with the implication that Alexander, the child of a Macedonian father, but also of the Greek Olympias, was not a wholly legitimate Macedonian.

Famously, Alexander threw a cup and there was a quarrel in which he was obliged to leave. Alexander withdrew with Olympias and was only later brought back to the court through negotiation.

Cleopatra produced her first child, a daughter. In spring 336, when Alexander had come back from his self-imposed flight from the kingdom, Philip sent his advance force into Asia, and one of the commanding generals was Attalus. The other was his trusted general Parmenion—with about ten thousand troops.

Cleopatra was pregnant again and this time gave birth to a boy named Caranus. In the autumn of 336 BC, Philip, preparing for his invasion of Asia the next year, held a second magnificent wedding, marrying Alexander's sister to a prince from Olympias's home kingdom of Epirus—another blow against Olympias's particular, close link to the kingdom.

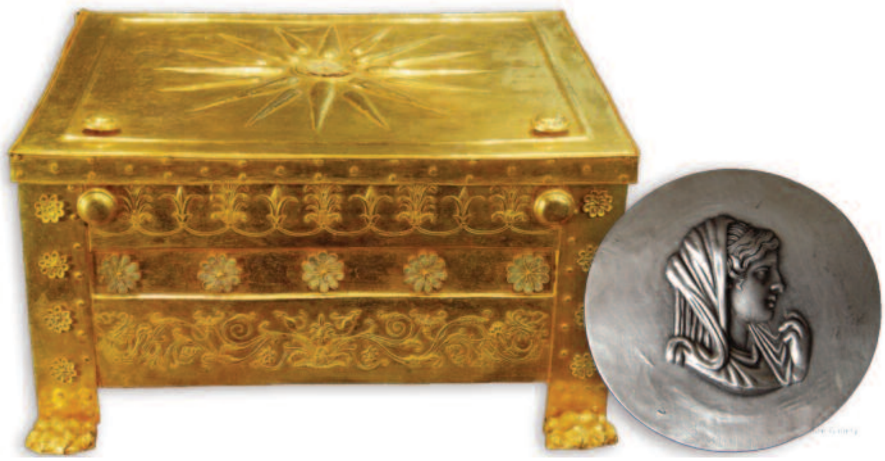
Philip invited his wedding guests from far and wide, as well as deputies from the Greek cities who came up for the first time to see inside a kingdom that they had thought of, in hostile moments, as barbaric.

The recent archaeological campaigns and extensive excavation have made it highly likely that the huge palace there is not a palace from after Alexander's conquests, but amazingly, the palace designed for Philip himself. Fifteen thousand square meters, with dozens of rooms and two stories of beautiful Greek pillars—this discovery has transformed the understanding of Greek architecture.

On the great day, at dawn, the guests were told to sit in the theater and wait as the tragedies and plays would begin. The statues of the Olympic gods circled around the area of the stage, and there was a thirteenth statue among the gods, Philip's own, indicative of the cult of a living ruler.

The king walked down from the palace, told Alexander to stand back and the bodyguards to part, and he walked onto the stage to receive the acclamation of his invited guests. But instead a bodyguard, Pausanias, approached Philip and stabbed him in front of the crowd, killing him.

Aristotle, who was in attendance, parsed the murder as personal revenge by Pausanias. But was it? Was perhaps Olympias, the rejected wife, ultimately responsible? Or, indeed, a long-running possibility aired, but perhaps never seriously entertained: was it perhaps Alexander too? It seems impossible to believe. Whatever the truth might be, history records that Alexander took the throne after the terrible moment of seeing his father bleeding and dead at his feet.



© Vergina Museum

Left: The larnax (a type of small closed coffin, box, or "ash-chest" often used as a container for human remains in ancient Greece) of Philip II, discovered in royal tombs at Vergina, Greece. Right: A modern reproduction of an original coin medallion believed to bear the likeness of Alexander's mother, Olympias.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What was the balance of power in the Greek world at the time of Alexander?
2. How did Philip set the stage for Alexander's later triumphs?

Suggested Reading

Fox, Robin Lane. *Alexander the Great*. New York: Penguin, 2004 (1973).

Other Books of Interest

Andronicos, Manolis. *Vergina: The Royal Tombs and the Ancient City*. Athens: Ekdotike Athenon S.A., 1989.

Hammond, Nicholas G.L. *Philip of Macedon*. London: Duckworth & Co., Ltd., 1994.

Worthington, Ian. *Philip II of Macedonia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

Websites of Interest

The *History of Macedonia* website provides a biography of Philip II of Macedon including maps, images, and links to other resources. — http://www.historyofmacedonia.org/AncientMacedonia/PhilipofMacedon.html

Lecture 3

Alexander's Ascendancy

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Robin Lane Fox's *Alexander the Great*.

The Problem of Philip's Murder

Pausanias was pursued by a group of bodyguards and stabbed to death before he could talk. Alexander's succession began, then, with a mystery. It seems pretty unlikely that Alexander himself put Pausanias up to the murder. Apart from inconsistency with Alexander's psychological makeup, it would have been stupid for Alexander to have his father killed in front of all the invited guests of future cities to which he would have to impose his rule. Better to have done it privately, and there would have been endless chances to do it inside the palace.

The question remains, however, of whether Olympias was aware of, or partly behind, the murder, because she had things to gain. Philip's new wife had produced Caranus, and Olympias was the rejected woman. If her son quickly took the throne, she would be back in Macedon.

Aristotle later classed the murder as one of personal revenge. What is known is that the accession required and involved a purge of other leading Macedonians. Modernizers, obviously used to a more constitutional takeover, feel that this is a hint of the savagery of Alexander as a king. It is, if anything, a foretaste of the qualities that secured him as a king. Only one Macedonian king had ever died in his bed. It was an extremely rough world, and if there had been any hesitation or gentleness on Alexander's part, he would have been killed.

The Way Forward

Several of the leading Macedonians, out in Asia with the advance force, simply fled and joined the armies of the Persian king. Alexander sent a rapid message out to the advance force and had Attalus assassinated.

Again, as so often in the early phase of Macedonian history, there is a sense of factional manipulation and familial adjustment. Alexander executed two brothers as suspects, but spared the third, who is known to be the son-in-law of Philip's most trusted official, Antipater, whom Alexander will rely on in his absence as the governor of Macedon and the dominant figure in Greece.

Alexander had to be wary, and out in Asia, with Attalus commanding the advance force, was Philip's famous general Parmenion, and Parmenion in fact chose Alexander. Parmenion's sons were given the highest command in the army that was to invade Asia. Alexander thus struck a delicate balance of interests. It was not a constitutionally assured accession by any means, and if Alexander had not killed whom he did he would assuredly have been killed himself.

Alexander started with a quick march down into Greece.

Olympias returned to Macedon and it is told that she killed Philip's final wife, one of seven, Cleopatra, and her two children, Europa and Caranus.

It was probably on this visit that Alexander returned from having been recognized as the leader of the Greek alliance that Philip had formed, through the suburbs of the Greek city of Corinth, where typically he asked to see the most famous of all the Greeks of the day—the cynic philosopher Diogenes. Alexander asked Diogenes, whom he saw living in poverty, if there wasn't something that Diogenes would like. Diogenes replied, "For you to stand aside, out of the sun."

A remarkable encounter, but the truth of it was that by swiftly marching south, Alexander had been accepted by the Greeks, many of whom had heard the rumors of what had happened in the theatre in Macedon.

Age twenty, Alexander had taken on a kingdom with proven, hardened generals, Philip's men. Philip's soldiers looked at him with some suspicion. There was no fixed order of procedure or fixed constitution. The king ruled over Macedonians who were in principle respectful of monarchy and royalty, and monarchy lasted in Macedon far longer than democracy in Athens. But they still had to question whether theirs was the right king.

The king ruled, surrounded by nobles, not all of whom liked him, some of whom he inherited, called Companions, but not always friends. He was personally guarded by a bodyguard. He would consult his nobles, but he was not bound by their decisions. He could put propositions or trials for the Macedonians, meeting as an assembly, but there was no fixed right of meeting at regular moments. The king consulted them if he wished, and he would act according to their views—if he decided to do so.

The murder of Attalus was not discussed with the army, nor the other purges that were necessary. The truth was, if the king failed, the nobles would simply kill him like their predecessors.

There was a Homeric tone to the society. Of course, Homer's poems were fiction, not reality, but the ruling of a king by might and prowess, establishing his claim through excellence in battle and in splendid generosity in a culture of the gift, was very strong in Philip's Macedonia.

It is that element of life among the Companions, ruling as a military leader and conqueror, sharing personal prowess in the first line, that suited the rivalry with the great Homeric hero Achilles, and this was increasingly Alexander's role-model and self-presentation. It wasn't just propaganda connected with the fact that his mother could claim descent through the lines of Greek mythology from the line of Achilles himself.

Unlike Achilles, Alexander inherited a highly trained and balanced army, enormously important for the years of his rule. The army was Philip's creation, one of the most remarkable outcomes of military planning by a single genius.

Philip's Army

The army was balanced with a wide variety of different weaponry and its participants were year-round professionals trained for that service and used in a thoughtful, interrelated sequence, which is contrary to the main drift of previous warfare in the Greek world.

Classically, on each wing, would be the squadrons of cavalry, and on the right wing, in Alexander's case led by Alexander himself, a squadron of cavalry with the name Companion Cavalry. The Companion title was a sign that they were honored and bound close to the king, maybe as many as three and a half thousand, arranged in squadron units, riding without stirrups, without saddles, armed with long spear and with a slashing sword—the famous kopis with its remarkably sharp edge and balance.

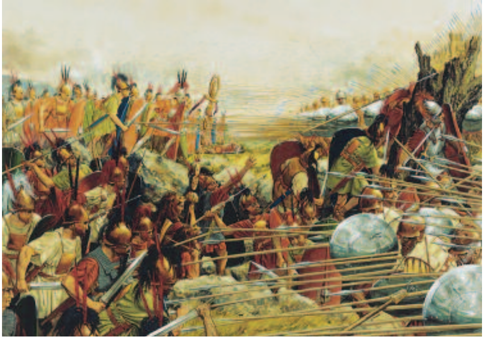
In the Greek world previously, cavalry had not been used to charge centrally into lines of formed infantry. The main function of cavalry was to fight the other cavalry and prevent them getting behind an enemy line, and above all to follow up when the line was broken in pursuit or to attack small groups who might be forming or vulnerable away from the main line before battle began.

That changed decisively with Philip and Alexander, and the major strike force of Alexander's victories all across Asia was the cavalry, having the tactic of feinting out onto the right and turning back into the center as the line shuffled across in opposition, trying to stop itself being outflanked.

The cavalry was arranged in formation in the shape of a wedge, with a point and an individual at the head, usually Alexander himself, galloping as if there was no tomorrow.

In the center Philip balanced the Companion Cavalry with the world-famous phalanx entirely original to Philip. Think of about nine thousand Macedonians brigaded traditionally in units of ten, but changed by Philip to eight, sixteen, or twenty-four, of various depths to which they could shuffle out and spread.

The armor of the Companion Cavalry was distinct. They carried small, rounded shields on one arm. Those in the front row wore protective greaves on their legs and a breastplate, and their weapon was the long spear or pike, called a sarissa—made out



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An artist's rendition of the Macedonian phalanx, armed with *sarissa*, fighting Persians.

of two jointed lengths of wood to the extension of sixteen to eighteen feet. The function was to move them up or down or charge with them forward as a great wall with a larger reach than the Hoplite spear-bearing Greek infantrymen, who simply couldn't have the same reach and get under this long, projecting façade of sarissa poles. If the cavalry began to break the line, the sarissa-bearing phalanx would move forward over flat ground and in regular formation and simply sweep the shattered ranks away, leaving them exposed to cavalry pursuit.

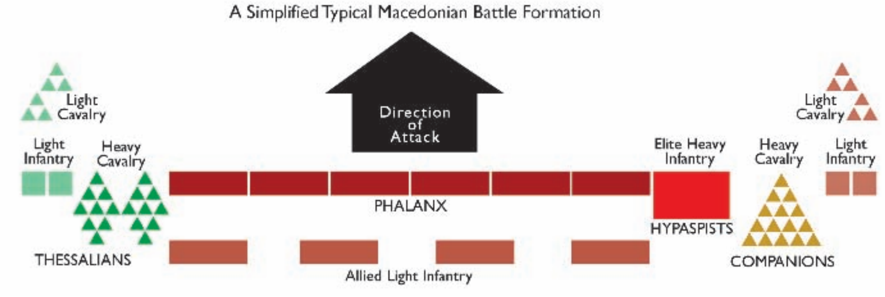
There had been experiments, very few, with spears longer than the normal nine-foot spear with which the Greek hoplites were armed, but nobody had thought of this long wall marching in disciplined order forward. When it was eventually conquered by the Romans in the Battle of Pydna in 168 BC, the Romans were led by the famous general Aemilius Paulus, and evidence is that in subsequent life he would say that the phalanx with sarissas was the most terrifying thing he had ever seen.

The sarissa-formed central unit, which could face about, stand at attention, and move slowly and steadily across the pitch, was at risk on its right flanks as the cavalry charged forward. It was here that Philip positioned his other great tactical stroke of genius, the Macedonian Shield Bearers (*Hypaspists*). The function of the *Hypaspists* was both to protect the vulnerable right of the phalanx and to link up with the cavalry as they began to gallop.

The three thousand troops inherited by Alexander may very well be the greatest infantrymen in the entire history of the world.

Not only did the Shield Bearers fight all through India and back, but they then reemerged in the wars of Alexander's would-be successors, where contemporaries tell that these men, who were in their sixties or even in their seventies, were still so terrifying in the central infantry line of the successors' armies that they could single-handedly turn the course of an infantry battle.

It was an unusual use of infantry, who would usually meet head on. Instead, it was the cavalry who broke the line, the sarissas who swept them away.


A Simplified Typical Macedonian Battle Formation
Direction of Attack
Light Cavalry
Light Infantry
Heavy Cavalry
THESSALIANS
PHALANX
Allied Light Infantry
Elite Heavy Infantry
HYPASPISTS
Heavy Cavalry
COMPANIONS
Light Cavalry
Light Infantry

Source: Cartographer Frank Martini, the Department of History, United States Military Academy.

Philip had also balanced other necessary units into his lines and formations, from the Thracian tribes, either he or possibly Alexander, recruited the fearsome Agrarians, who were armed with javelins and were the equal of the Shield Bearers for special operations. Archers and slingers came from the Greeks, experts from Crete and from Rhodes, and again on the left wing, on Alexander's classic line, under Philip's great general Parmenion, Alexander would place the greatest of the Greek allies, the Thessalians, perhaps the Greeks who were closest to the Macedonians. The Thessalians fought with their magnificent horsemen in diamond formations. Often their role was to anchor the left while Alexander would charge in characteristic style on the right, and the phalanx would form in the middle.

Behind the battle line there was balance and variety, but also a unified plan that almost reversed the previous history of warfare.

The army was trained to work in formation and it was also professionally trained year after year, not just a sudden call-up of people who had hardly exercised together. For that Philip had used the dependent war captives, putting slaves to work in the land and agriculture in Macedon to set the Macedonians free.

But Philip also had the problem of how to take walled cities, a problem that would be superbly addressed and surmounted by his son Alexander. Here, Philip gave a decisive thrust to the Greeks' incipient interest in siege machinery and artillery. He used powered catapults that shot arrows at great distance, lethally, with the power of twisted torsion. Above all, there were enormous innovations, particularly under Alexander, in the scale and nature of siege machinery.

The Macedonian army was capable of moving fast. On special operations the dreaded Shield Bearers would cover vast areas in great heat with much speed. They were extremely fit. Philip trained them on special forced marches. It was said that nobody was allowed a hot bath in Philip's Macedon except for a woman who had just given birth.

There had been discussion of supplies and logistics, and it is clear despite dispute that the army was backed up with a wheeled transport pulled by yoked animals carrying extra food over land, where necessary, and of course carrying dismantled weapons, replacement sarissas, and all that was important.

Never until the end of Alexander's life was the army seriously hampered by a supply crisis, and this says much for the commanders at the local squadron and unit level.

There was a professional chain of command stretching right down through the army, essential in the victories to follow.

On Campaign

In Alexander's first year, 336–35 BC, he engaged in two quick campaigns, one into the adjacent kingdom of Thrace, the area of modern Bulgaria, which Philip subdued, so important for manpower and money, and also the campaign against the Illyrians, the traditional tribal non-Greek enemies of the Macedonian kings to the northwest, extending up into modern-day Albania.

Even in the very first year of Alexander's rule, in Thrace, the sarissas and phalanx advanced straight through the fields of standing corn, and by a sideways movement of the sarissas they flattened the crops as they marched in perfect formation toward the stunned rabble of the Thracian infantry.

After the interventions in Thrace as far as the river Danube and in Illyria, which essentially settled and reasserted Philip's control over those areas, Alexander was summoned back to deal with an incipient revolt among the Greek states.

In 338 BC, Philip had defeated the combined forces of the Greek opponents, particularly the Thebans and Athenians, at the battle of Chaeronea. He had gone on then in the following winter and invaded Sparta. He had agreed and sworn oaths for a common peace among what he called his Greek Allies, who would constitute a sitting council of deputies and would recognize Philip as the leader.

Radical political upheavals in the individual member cities were then forbidden. There were to be no redistributions of land and no abolition of debt. There were strong provisions against certain types of interstate warfare and factional dispute. Philip also appointed a rather shadowy group called "Those Appointed to Take Care of the Common Safety." It seems likely they were military troops and generals. They had never been heard of before in Greek history, and though the alliance proclaimed the freedom and autonomy of the Greeks at its head, it should probably be seen as not offering true freedom to the Greeks, who were forced into it and kept obedient by the presence of Macedonian troops.

No Mercy

Philip's victory had meant a real diminution in the freedom of the participating Greeks, and in Alexander's absence, the city of Thebes, which had been harshly treated by Philip, decided to revolt.

Faster than probably anticipated by the Thebans, Alexander's army returned from campaigning in Illyria and was at the walls of Thebes.

The sequence of events remains disputed among historians. Did Alexander send ambassadors? Did he offer peace in return for surrender? Did he attack head on, or was he drawn into an attack?

There might have been an offer of a truce. But if there was, the Thebans certainly ignored it. Thebes's smaller neighbors were in fact her greatest enemies.

They joined Alexander in what was to become an outright assault against an ally who had rebelled and put itself outside the terms of King Philip's alliance.

Alexander's troops broke in. Their garrison, which had been in the city and under threat from the rebels, joined them, and in a massive attack the Thebans were forced to surrender. Thirty thousand Thebans were enslaved and simply sold off. Arrian reports that Alexander put the decision of what to do with Thebes to the neighboring Greek cities.

The neighboring Greeks voted to flatten the city entirely, and the Macedonians did so. This is why there are no great ruins at Thebes for anyone to visit.

Panic ensued among the Athenians and other Greeks.

Philip had done the same thing on his borders to the big Greek city of Olynthus, which he also flattened. If Thebes had rebelled against Philip's alliance, Philip would almost assuredly have done the same thing.

Anyone who opposed Alexander afterwards had the firm message that Alexander would show no mercy to those who opposed him. It was important because the danger for a king invading Asia was that the Greek cities behind him could be bribed by the Persians and cause the king to return to fight again for control of Greece.

Alexander spared the house of the poet Pindar, the great author of athletic odes who had written an ode in honor of the previous Macedonian king, but Alexander spared almost nothing else.

With Thebes broken, and the other Greeks in check, the way was clear for the invasion of Asia.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. How had Philip arranged his army?
2. What was unusual about the Macedonian spear, or sarissa?

Suggested Reading

Fox, Robin Lane. *Alexander the Great*. New York: Penguin, 2004 (1973).

Other Books of Interest

Fuller, J.F.C. *The Generalship of Alexander the Great*. New York: De Capo Press, 2004 (1958).

Marsden, E.W. *Greek and Roman Artillery, Vol. 1: Historical Development*. Oxford: Sandpiper Books, 1969.

———. *Greek and Roman Artillery, Vol. II: Technical Treatises*. Oxford: Sandpiper Books, 1969.

Sekunda, Nicholas V. *The Army of Alexander the Great*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 1992 (1984).

Lecture 4

Into Persia

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Robin Lane Fox's *Alexander the Great*, chapters 3 and 7.

After sacking Thebes, Alexander returned to Macedon and held a great celebration. In the following spring, 334, Alexander set out for Asia Minor (modern Turkey) to follow up the advance invasion in this western fringe of the long-lasting Persian empire.

A New Achilles and Patroclus

At first, Philip had sent some ten thousand troops and there had been success and a strong response to the offer of freedom from Persian rule, but the Macedonians had been driven back on Philip's death and were hanging on only in the corner of the Asian continent, within reach of the Dardanelles.

Alexander brought another thirty-five thousand or so troops, giving him in all forty-some thousand troops. Five-and-a-half thousand were to be the mounted cavalrymen, nine to twelve thousand the Macedonian infantry, and a significant portion from the non-Greek neighbors of Ilyrians and Thracians, far fewer infantrymen supplied by those Greek allies for whose benefit the campaign had been given a particular public spin. It originated no doubt with Philip—that the aim of what was in fact a straight power struggle was presented as being a wish to punish the Persians for the sacrilege committed in Greece in 480 BC, when they burned temples, particularly when they flattened the temple on Athens's Acropolis, and secondly to free the Greeks of Asia Minor.

It was important to have an uplifting spin, a justification for the invasion, both to touch the opinion of Greeks who might rebel and because Alexander depended somewhat on Greek support to man his fledgling navy. One hundred and sixty ships went with him as naval support across the Aegean, with the problem of facing a much larger Persian fleet.

As they set out on the great expedition, Olympias was said to order Alexander to live up to his birth and begetting, his fathership—seeming to suggest that the theme of Alexander's divine fathership was already being sewn in his mind by his mother, who he was never to see again.

They marched in Asia Minor, their advance already known to the Persian king and his Persian local governors—satraps who ruled the individual provinces down western Asia minor, and it would be for the local satraps in the first instance to muster an army to repulse Alexander. They had been acting with success against the previous Macedonian invasion and had every reason to expect they could wrap this up quickly.

Alexander revisited the heroes of Troy, and he went off, contrary to the demands of strategy, as he landed in Asia, to pay tribute to the epic heroes.

Alexander sacrificed a bull in honor of the sea god, poured libations from a golden cup to the nymphs of the sea, and then jumped in full armor from his trireme and hurled his spear into the soil of the Persian empire. Instead of gathering his troops and first taking on the Persians, it was to those heroes he turned.

Alexander sacrificed at the tomb of the first to die on the fabled Greek entry into Asia, and Alexander went to Troy itself, which had decayed to a village, quite away from the strategic line that his march should have required. He honored the grave of King Priam and engaged in elaborate honors, not only for Achilles, but for Patroclus too—indicative of deeply held personal reasons.

It is told the people of Troy offered to show him the lyre of Paris, and Alexander was said to have responded that he cared not for it and only for the lyre of Achilles. Alexander arranged to be crowned with a gold crown by one of his officers, who had the same name as the father of Patroclus.

And then side by side with his beloved friend Hephaistion he ran naked to the tomb of Achilles, while Hephaistion ran to the tomb of Patroclus. This derives from Arrian's eyewitness sources—and it is one of the primary pieces of early evidence for the close attachment between Alexander and Hephaistion, who is described specifically as Alexander's lover, but in later sources, particularly in Arrian, in another context.

The two undoubtedly seem to have been young lovers, in a sexual relationship, as could happen frequently among Greek boys. Homoerotic relations, in Macedon, were not uncommon among royal pages. No Greek morality or Greek divinity regarded it as a sin, and it was frequent that the men involved would grow up, marry, have children, and probably leave their boy lovers behind. It was not in itself evidence for terming Alexander homosexual in the modern sense.

As will be seen, Alexander would continue to have relations with quite a few women and would also father children. But Hephaistion is above all the special relationship of his life. Setting him side by side for crowning at the tomb of Patroclus, who had been presented in Greek drama since Homer, who never said so, as Achilles's male lover, is programmatic and significant.

Achilles's armor (wherever this came from), shield, and spear were offered to Alexander, and he took the offerings with him.

There is more here than just a sacrifice for the benefit of publicity—it does seem that the whole atmosphere was closely coordinated and personal.

A Taste of Victory

Leaving Troy, Alexander headed west to the river Granicus, where the Persian forces had been gathering. The Persians were stronger in cavalry than in coordinated citizen infantry troops. Heavy armor was not easy to wear in the great heat of Iran, and the Persian social order didn't naturally lend itself to the trained, hardy, hoplite spear-bearing infantry of the Greek world.

And so the Persians hired twenty thousand Greek mercenaries, and the cavalry would be made up of Persian nobles and of local recruits from the Persian subjects in this province. Alexander may have had the greater number, but the Persians were entrenched in the better position on the far bank of a river that Alexander somehow had to cross—the difficulty being that the phalanx was most vulnerable if it broke apart, and maintaining ranks in a river crossing was extremely difficult.

In Arrian, there is an account of how Parmenion, Alexander's senior general, urged Alexander to wait to attack at dawn the following day, when they might have the element of surprise. Alexander rejected the idea. The battle took place, led by the cavalry charging straight into the river and dislodging Persian cavalry holding the far bank. The phalanx then crossed, and with a series of remarkable events, victory was Alexander's.

In the alternative tradition, what scholars call the Vulgate, the battle took place at dawn as Parmenion ordered. This would seem to make more strategic sense, but when looking at all the other battles in the Vulgate, the other accounts are manifestly inaccurate, and this is a good lesson for forthcoming events, too, where the Vulgate sources suggest accounts that are superficially attractive, but which lack authority when really weighed against the Arrian version.

So it seems likely that Alexander had stormed ahead as in the first instance, the Persians probably surprised by the shock of the charge, and their spears not as strong as the Macedonians'. There was close combat in which Alexander himself was distinguished and nearly killed. He encountered two Persian noblemen, one of whom slashed hard into Alexander's helmet, and Alexander was only saved when his father's old friend Cleitus galloped up from behind and cut through the offending Persian.

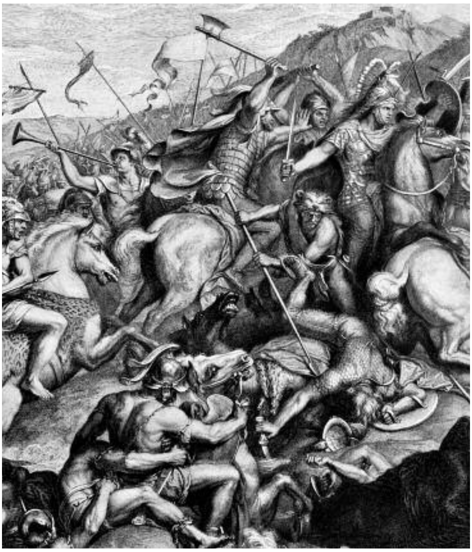


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Illustration based on the painting *Alexander at Granitus* by Charles LeBrun, ca. 1675, showing Cleitus (axe raised) saving Alexander.

The Persian ranks broke, and behind the lines, isolated, the Persians' Greek mercenaries, twenty thousand of them, were told to stand strong.

Again, there is a dispute. Does Alexander offer them terms? Or does he attack them as they are already broken in their lines? Or do they stand firm in a dangerous, head-on battle?

In any case, after a full-out attack, the Greek mercenaries were killed as traitors against the resolutions of the Greek allies, a terrible warning to them all.

It was a great victory, but it did not show any particular use for the phalanx armed with sarissas in this first battle.

Typically, Alexander went around and discussed injuries with all the wounded. He sent captured shields back from the battle to the Greeks, cleverly inscribed with the programmatic inscription, "Alexander, Son of Philip"—not king, not leader, just as an ordinary fellow citizen.

As for the fallen dead, the sculptor Lycipius, the greatest sculptor of the day, was told to sculpt the twenty-five Companion Cavalrymen who fell in the first heat of battle, the famous group to be set up at Dion on the Macedonian southern border, where the group stood for at least another one hundred and eighty years, until taken to Rome by the conquering Roman armies.

Liberating Cities

So often in Greek history, and prominently here, the Greek communities were split between opposing factions, usually between oligarchs, ruled by the few, and the *demos*, people who supported *democratia*, in which every citizen has one vote. The Persians had been supporting oligarchs in the face of Philip's planned invasion.

Alexander descended on the city of Ephesus and proposed the installation of democracy in the city, where he won great popularity for ending the civic strife. It was not, of course, the case that Alexander was crusading for democracy. He was a realist. The opposite side was opposed to him, so he sent one of his generals, Alchimicus, out through the Greek cities of Ionia and Eoila, offering to set up democracies everywhere and to end the tribute that had been paid previously to the Persians. Alchimicus had great success with the cities. A new era of freedom involving democracy did then begin in the Greek city-states.

Scholars are suspicious of liberations. But it was unprecedented in these Greek cities' experience both to be let off tribute and to have democracies entrenched with a ruler's support.

Alexander did demand a temporary payment called a contribution, but it was only a temporary payment.

Alexander first moved to a non-Greek center, the city of Sardis, whose Persian governor offered to surrender rather than be attacked. Alexander took over and allowed the Lydians to use their ancient laws. His terms for the city were popular, and he encouraged the building of a new temple.

Alexander marched south, Greek cities being freed around him, down to the Greek city of Miletus. There he encountered opposition. There were Persian-supported Greek mercenaries willing to fight him again. The citizenry were not sure whether to go over to him, and a big Persian fleet, three hundred or so ships, had come up ready to fight a naval battle.

Alexander then made a strategic change, which puzzled even the ancients and increased the risks of his expedition.

Alexander had been commanding one hundred and sixty allied ships, and he simply dismissed them rather than risk a fatal battle.

Why did he do it? A shortage of money has been suggested, and there might be something in that. But he also might have realized the opposing armies were more expert than his own—and probably more reliable. He might have hoped that the areas that had recently revolted from the Persian king might prefer to defect from Persian rule and join him. But for the moment, the Persian oarsmen stayed loyal.

Alexander, rather than risk a fatal defeat, dismissed the fleet and continued to wage war by land instead. This was risky. He would develop a strategy of capturing the naval bases through which that fleet could put back into Asia, reprovision, and cause him trouble. But it exposed the Aegean Sea, between Asia and Greece, to Persian action, and it really tested the possibility that despite the sack of Thebes, Greeks behind Alexander might wish to join a Persian counteroffensive.

The Persian command was not just organized by Persians. The Persians also employed a Greek military expert, Memnon. Even more remarkably, Memnon and his brother Mentor had spent time in exile at Philip's Macedonia.

At the eleventh hour, Miletus chose to surrender. Alexander reached terms with the Greek mercenaries and treated Miletus relatively mildly.

Throughout the spring of 334 and on into 333, Alexander pushed on, encountering cities that either were Greek or claimed to be Greek, and he in turn declared them free and autonomous.

Alexander came not just as a raider, but as an aspiring future king of Asia who would rule Asia Minor outside the Greek cities on much the same principles as before—through newly appointed governors whom he would call, as the Persians had, satraps.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What was the significance of the dual crownings at Troy?
2. What was the difficulty of a river crossing for the Macedonian phalanx?

Suggested Readings

Fox, Robin Lane. *Alexander the Great*. New York: Penguin, 2004 (1973).

Other Books of Interest

Ehrenberg, Victor. *Alexander and the Greeks*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1982 (1938).

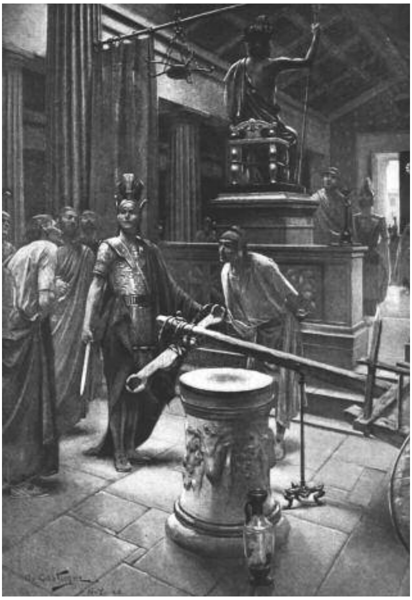
Lecture 5

Facing Darius

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Robin Lane Fox's *Alexander the Great*, chapter 12.

Some cities instituted new calendars beginning with the date of Alexander's freeing them, and when addressing the question of Alexander being worshiped as a god, it must be remembered that some of the political groups in these cities may already have spontaneously been honoring him in this way rather earlier than thought in modern histories.

The Gordian Knot



A textbook illustration of Alexander and the Gordian Knot, ca. 1935.

As Alexander marched south, after a bitter siege of the semi-Greek city of Halicarnassus, he entered the province of Caria on the southwest corner of Asia Minor. There he reversed a grievance dating to recent Persian rule, the first clear sign of a tactic he would follow in areas where there were no Greek cities. For years, Caria had been ruled by members of the Hecatomid ruling family, but at the time of their ruler making an approach to Philip about a marriage arrangement, the Persians had put the whole area under a non-Hecatomid Persian ruler.

There was a survivor, Queen Ada, who had ruled previously with one of her brothers and was living in retreat under Persian rule. When Alexander arrived and liberated Caria, he reappointed Ada as a governor of the area and he allowed himself to be adopted by her as if he were her son. This was a tactical move in a dynastic system of rule.

Alexander turned inland to spend the winter in central Anatolia, where he could receive reinforcements from Macedon, important because the more he pushed into Asia, the more likely the Persian king himself would muster a force to oppose him.

The capital of Phrygia was Gordium, and it was there, winter 334–33, that Alexander engaged in the famous exercise of cutting the Gordian knot.

There had been an ancient chariot whose yoke was knotted in a particular way and preserved in the heights of Gordium. The prophecy was that whoever resolved the knot would be the ruler of Asia.

In the version from Aristobulus, it is described that Alexander took out the pin and dealt with the tangled knot.

The other version is that he looked at it with obvious impatience, drew his sword, and cut through the knot. He was thereafter hailed as the future king of Asia.

Darius III

From Gordium in the spring, Alexander headed south and managed to penetrate the undefended difficult areas into southern Turkey. The satrap there seemed to panic and desert a point that could have been defended against Alexander—an example of how Alexander is favored by bold decisions that scare the opposition.

A number of things delayed Alexander. He went down into the city of Tarsus, where he took a swim in the local river and caught a fever. In late summer, autumn 333, his army was delayed in the non-Greek city of Tarsus while Alexander was seriously sick. The campaign depended on him and his direction.

Meanwhile, inevitably, after Alexander had disbanded his fleet, the Persians mounted a counterattack back through the islands of the Aegean and at times against some of the cities Alexander thought he had definitively freed, along the coast and along the islands, trying to connect with the Greeks and mount a rebellion that would inevitably pull Alexander back from the Asian campaign.

This was extremely serious. But Alexander had one great stroke of luck. The Persian offensive was led by the Greek-speaking Memnon, and fortunately for Alexander, Memnon fell ill and died, and the command passed to less capable admirals who were not naturally so congenial to the possible Greek allies.

Alexander was so deep into Persian territory that there was bound to be a counterattack. Alexander knew that a Persian army would be coming westwards to take him on. The Persian king was King Darius III, a figure whom some Greek sources, when he was defeated, represented as slavish, cowardly, and inevitably prone to run away—criticisms that were probably not justified.

Darius had taken the Persian throne at a difficult time, after the brief careers of two kings whose reigns had ended by poisoning and by coup. Darius had been relied upon to steady the ship. He had proved himself earlier in battle in Persia and showed himself a sound, capable warrior.

To this point Darius had not been directly engaged, but now Darius led a grand army mustered to go to the western coast and challenge Alexander.

In the autumn, Alexander eventually recovered. He sent his senior general ahead, round the coast of Lycia to hold the narrows over which a much-used road passed into Syria toward the general direction of modern Aleppo and the river Euphrates.

Alexander went into the open plains and would continue to push into the heart of Asia until he encountered the king—that was his plan, at any rate.

The line of coasts were hedged off from inner Asia by a long mountain chain, particularly the Amanid mountains. Alexander marched on with an army of forty thousand or more down along the coast in late October, early November, until over on the Syrian side of the border, he heard the most devastating news—that Darius's grand army (perhaps of eighty thousand) had marched up the other side of the mountain chain and had passed Alexander unseen without either side realizing it.

Darius and his troops were going north to find Alexander on the south Turkish coast, and Alexander himself was going south on the other side of the mountains to break out into the desert plains of Syria to encounter the Persian king there.

The result was that Alexander's troops had marched beyond Darius, who had come out in their rear and had occupied their former base at the town of Issus. The Persian king could then march south and catch Alexander from behind.

The Greek sources report that Darius and his generals mutilated some of the wounded and sick Alexander had left behind, and at this point deserters gave Alexander, in early November, the news that must have stunned him.

If ever there was a battle that a great commander in world history should have lost, this is the one.

There were two options: first, to march on, and then face about. As the king came through the narrow defile where Alexander was, Alexander could engage battle as the king's troops burst out onto the plain. The mistake in this strategy would have been that the king had vastly superior numbers and if the king could have gotten out into open territory and deployed, it would have been an infinitely more difficult battle.

But what Alexander did was to make a ringing speech to his officers, on that wet night, and he got them to turn around and go back up the coastal route, knowing they would surprise the king, heading south, and catch him in the narrows, where his numbers would in fact be a disadvantage because he wouldn't be able to deploy properly.

To get the army to turn around, reform, and march in an orderly fashion toward a battle no one had anticipated says something about Alexander's magnetic powers of presentation, speech, and communication of strategic purpose—and it also says much for the extreme discipline running like a spine through the army.

The Persians were committed to marching south through the narrow strip of mountains, and after a day, Alexander's men began to encounter the Persian army.

The lead-up to the battle formations is preceded by Alexander constantly moving his units from side to side, confusing the king as to what his exact battle plan would be.

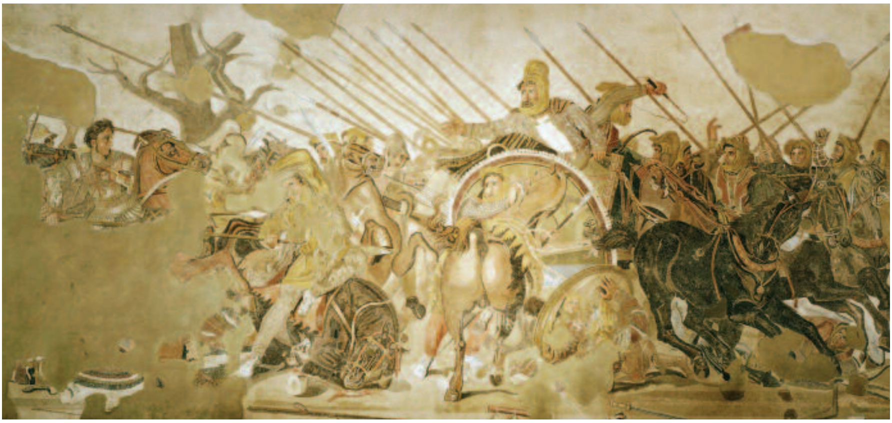
The Persian line, more cumbersome, with many more men, all unable to deploy on a full front, had to react to a constantly shifting battle order. And it was Alexander who was first to make a decisive movement—on what had become his right—of seizing the lower foothills of the mountain chain and thereby controlling access to the heights.

It is clear from the difficult melee that followed that the Persian king did not have any good, trained infantry. He relied once again on hired Greek mercenaries. But he did have numerical superiority, and he had significant cavalry, and in between him and Alexander, there was a river bed.

Alexander's tactics showed for the first time the use in a pitched battle of the formula devised by his father Philip. His senior general Parmenion played an important role, holding the left and not giving way down the edge of the sea shore, where the Persians really went at him. One should never underestimate the importance of the anchorman on the left.

The center would essentially be represented by the sarissa-armed central phalanx, but they would have a problem. They were best on level ground and were faced with a river between them and the Persians, and it was hard to hold formation in a river crossing.

The Shield Bearers were the link to the cavalry, all to be mustered around Alexander himself.



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The Battle of Issus between Alexander the Great and Darius III showing a wall of sarissas behind Darius as Alexander enters the fray. Roman mosaic discovered in the House of the Faun, Pompeii.

The tactic the cavalry used was to pull out at a slight angle to the right, and when they had drawn the opponent over, to cut left, a sophisticated movement made possible by the dramatic skill of the Companion Cavalry.

The advantage of the maneuver was that as they pulled out to the right, the opposing infantry line would shuffle across to meet them, or at least block them from outflanking them. As the line shifted sideways, if they were not highly trained infantry, gaps would open in the line and the cavalry could go straight in and break it.

As the Persian kings usually fought in the center of their lines, there was the further possibility that one could get to the king himself.

No Persian king had faced tactics of this disciplined nature before.

The major credit of the victory seems assuredly to belong to the spear-headed attack of the cavalry, and to Alexander's maneuvering of its units.

As Alexander broke into the center of the line, he came close to the position of King Darius himself, and there was even a claim that Alexander was wounded in the thigh by Darius.

The crucial thing in battle was to kill the leader at the top, because the subjects of the kingdom would be lost and hesitate, perhaps looking to their own safety if their leader was either forced to flee or dead on the battlefield.

Darius escaped, having narrowly avoided a confrontation with Alexander that could have been fatal.

Behind Alexander, as the line of the Persians broke and the king rattled away in his chariot, the sarissa-bearing phalanx tried to cross the intervening river and engage in its classic training, which was to sweep a broken line of infantry away with its pikes. But the phalanx was not trained to cross a river and subsequent rough ground. It broke apart, and for once, the Persian infantry, in this case hired Greeks, did some real damage to some of the Macedonian units.

It's clear that the cavalry—and Alexander—really carried the day.

Magnanimous in Victory

Conventionally, the person who controlled the bodies of the dead on a battlefield and had to be asked to have the dead buried was regarded as the winner. So there has been in Greek warfare a long-term tendency for the victors to occupy the field. The horsemen might go off and harass retreating infantry, but the signal of defeat was that the commander controlled the dead on the battlefield.

This was not Alexander's practice at all. Here was the hand of Philip, who made it plain that victory did not begin and end on the battlefield, and he was credited with long pursuits for the reason of capturing the fugitive king and opposing courtiers.

Alexander's companion Ptolemy reported that Alexander set off on such a pursuit, and that the Persian dead were so many that the ravines and valleys of the surrounding territory were full of them, making it easy for Alexander to ride across on the bodies of the dead—perhaps an image too grandly imagined, but a remarkable one nonetheless.

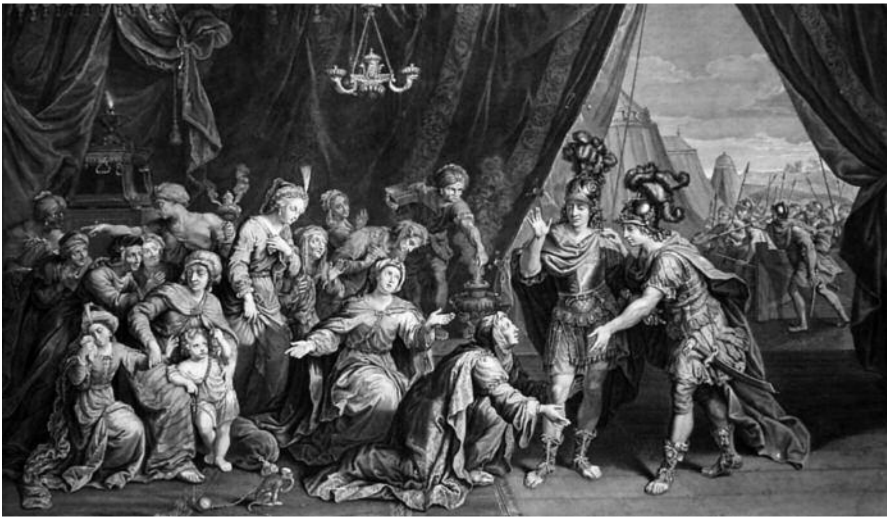
Alexander did not succeed in capturing Darius, however.

Alexander could be magnanimous in victory. It is told that Alexander returned from his pursuit and was offered a bath in Darius's tent. According to Plutarch, when Alexander saw all the tubs and basins of gold so carefully crafted, and how the inside of the tent was so wonderfully scented with spices and oils, he turned to his men and said, "So this, it would seem, is to be a king."

The most precious casket captured from Darius's belongings was brought to Alexander, and there was debate as to what should be put inside it. Alexander said, significantly, "In it I will keep my copy of Homer's *Iliad*."

Among the wounded came reports that the daughters, wife, and mother of Darius had been captured. When Alexander heard them lamenting and crying, he sent one of his officers to reassure them and went down to visit them and promise them that no harm would come to them. In a famous scene, the mother mistook the accompanying Hephaistion for Alexander and curtsied to him instead. She was ashamed and flustered when the error was pointed out. Alexander, however, said, "Don't worry. He too is an Alexander." And the women were treated nobly.

Alexander received reports at all sides about the great splendor with which the Persian army had been traveling. News arrived from Parmenion in Damascus about all the further treasures that had been captured in the entourage.



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Alexander treats the family of Darius III with mercy after the Battle of Issus.

> *Alexander went round all the other wounded in his camp and talked to them individually. He collected the dead, buried them magnificently, ordered his army to be arrayed in full battle finery. He had words of congratulations for all he himself had seen and who had distinguished themselves, particularly by bravery . . . and with extra gifts of money he honored them all according to their merits.*
>
> ~Plutarch
> *Life of Alexander*

Barsine

The Macedonians had captured the daughter of a Persian nobleman, herself a lady of royal descent, called Barsine. She had had two husbands who were Greek commanders in Persian service, the brothers Mentor and Memnon. Barsine and her father Artabazus had gone in the late 350s, when Alexander was five or six years old, in exile to Philip's Macedonia.

Eighteen years later, on Parmenion's advice, Alexander attached himself to this well-mannered and beautiful noblewoman, and she became his mistress. It was an extraordinary relationship, which was to last and produce a son and go on for another six years. It would be an important hint to Alexander about Persian ceremonial behavior and of course a tie to the potential defection and loyalty of her brothers and family around Darius.

Darius had fled inland. Many commanders might have decided to pursue him with the full army as far as they could. Darius would have taken refuge in one or other of the big walled cities and there would have been a long and difficult process, attempted siege, and disaffection of the Persian population—the campaign of liberation would have ground to a halt.

Alexander had the wit and insight to do the opposite. He continued southward down the coastline, into Syria and the Levant, taking one by one the fortified cities that could be the bases for the Persian fleet. He left Darius to return to the center of his army and to the center of his court with the survivors, knowing that Darius would summon an even grander army and make a final stand.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What stunning news reached Alexander as he marched south to meet Darius?
2. Why did Alexander decline to pursue Darius with his full army?

Suggested Reading

Fox, Robin Lane. *Alexander the Great*. New York: Penguin, 2004 (1973).

Other Books of Interest

Hammond, Nicholas G.L. *Alexander the Great: King, Commander, Statesman.* 2nd ed. London: Duckworth Publishers, 2009.

Lecture 6

The Son of Zeus

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Robin Lane Fox's *Alexander the Great*, chapter 14.

The battle of Issus was conclusive on the field, but it did scatter Persian resistance to all parts of the compass. Some of the Persians escaped north in Asia Minor and they may be the reason for three battles, in subsequent months, credited to Alexander's general and future successor, Antigonus.

The Ultimate Besieger

Others had fled with Darius. Others still had gone down to Egypt, where they had caused turbulence and been essentially rejected by the native Egyptian population. Alexander's obvious line was to go down the coast of Syria and the Levant and into Egypt—not, however, as yet enforced by a fleet. He was moving out of areas where Greek was ever spoken, and he would be relying on bilingual support and interpreters for much of the rest of his life.

The Levant had a history of revolt against Persia. The two greatest Phoenician cities were the cities of Sidon and Tyre, both under Persian rule, and it was Sidon that had rebelled only ten years before.

Alexander was duly welcomed at Sidon, and he appointed a new king, Abdalonymus.

In Tyre, Alexander asked for permission to sacrifice to the local Tyrian god, whom he saw as his own Greek Heracles. The Tyrians denied it, and on their fortified island site, they decided to resist, Alexander having no fleet.

What followed is an example of Alexander's skill as the ultimate besieger. Unlike Philip, he never failed. The siege of Tyre was an enormous undertaking. It involved his men eventually building a causeway for the good part of a mile from the coastline out to the island city. Every sort of device was mobilized, and the engineer Diades was responsible for much of the machinery: the huge towers, the large poking poles or swings, the battering rams, and the boulder-throwing machines, all of which Alexander marshaled on all sides. Alexander attacked by varied means at various points on the perimeter.

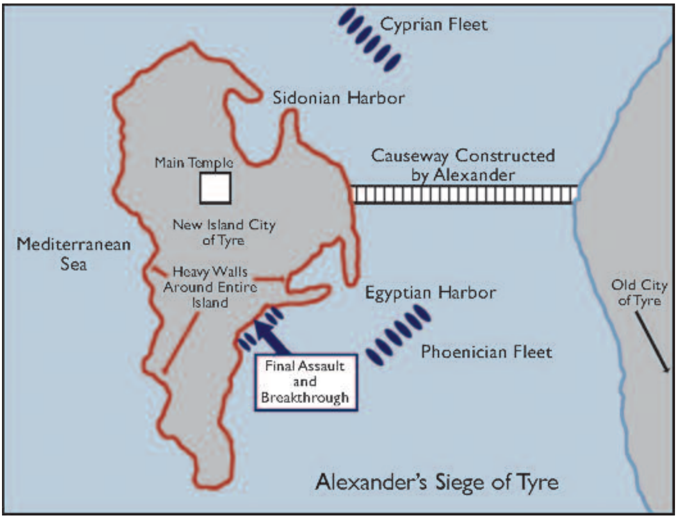
There were two great moments: One involved the return of the Cypriot ships that had been sailing with the Persian fleet during the counterattack of the previous year, 333. With the death of Memnon, the force of the counterattack had been blunted, and on coming across to Tyre, some of the kings, Greeks by descent, calculated that it was better to join Alexander, who one by one was immobilizing their naval bases along the line of the shore.

At last Alexander's highly risky strategy of defeating the Persian fleet by land was paying off, and the threat to his rear, the Aegean, the link-up with the Greeks, was greatly diminished, although back in Greece, it was the Spartan king Agis who was keenest on importing mercenaries for a last-ditch revolt against Macedonian power.

The second great moment was the fall of the city, when Alexander himself was through the battlements soon after the very first of them. The city of Tyre was ruthlessly taken, and one and all were slaughtered except for the king, Azemilk. Alexander dedicated a siege machine to Heracles, and he reappointed Azemilk himself to rule the resettled Tyre.

Alexander marched south toward Egypt and encountered also the fortified city of Gaza, which had a Persian governor, a eunuch called Batis. The siege of Gaza is almost more incredible than that of Tyre. The defenders said that it was almost impossible to besiege the city, and Alexander simply told his Macedonians to pile up a giant manmade mound of sand, which would eventually be raised higher than the city walls to allow the Macedonians to shoot down into the city from above.

The city surrendered, and Batis could only expect the grossest punishment. There is a story that Alexander, as if like Achilles, who dragged the dead body of Hector around the walls of Troy, attached the body of Batis to his chariot and drove round the city—the difference being that, unlike Hector, Batis was still alive. The story is, however, highly suspicious.


Cyprian Fleet
Sidonian Harbor
Causeway Constructed by Alexander
Main Temple
New Island City of Tyre
Mediterranean Sea
Heavy Walls Around Entire Island
Egyptian Harbor
Old City of Tyre
Phoenician Fleet
Final Assault and Breakthrough
Alexander's Siege of Tyre

Source: The Department of History, United States Military Academy

The seven-month-long siege of the island city of Tyre ended in success for Alexander after he had a mile-long causeway constructed and finally battered the walls surrounding the city with rams mounted aboard ships.

From Gaza, Alexander continued south into the kingdom of Egypt, which had been under Persian rule, on and off, for nearly two hundred years. Persian rule was much resented by Egyptians, who had a proud past and hated foreign rule.

Whereas the population had rebelled frequently against the Persians, they welcomed Alexander, and he was honored by the Egyptians. In a legend of his conquest, he was formerly crowned in a coronation ceremony by the priesthood as the new pharaoh of Egypt, but there is no way to be sure that such a ceremony took place.

Conspicuously, Alexander did not appoint a single foreign satrap or governor. He had not appointed a satrap of Phoenicia—there he had retained the local kings—and in Egypt he divided the commands between two separate commanders with support from below by military commanders, secretaries, and so forth. It was not a lasting solution. One of them resigned and a Greek called Cleomenes emerged in Alexander's absence to become the dominant figure. But the initial settlement again showed Alexander's flexibility with local rule.

The Oracle of Ammon

The purest of the Vulgate sources put the sequence of events that follow in the wrong order.

Alexander went off in late winter, early spring, along the western desert of Egypt toward Lybia. He turned inland on a rough desert route, with a small party of followers, guided, as told, either by snakes, according to Ptolemy, or by crows, according to Callisthenes. There was a sense of miracle and wonder on this journey to consult a god at a famous shrine on the border of Egypt and Lybia, the god long known to the Greeks as Ammon, equated with the Greeks' own supreme god, Zeus.

Alexander founded the great city of Alexandria on the edge of the Mediterranean, not far from where there had been a previous village settlement. Remember, he had not yet even reconquered Darius's final army and definitely asserted himself as the plausible successor king in Asia.

The Vulgate sources imply that he went off to the oracle before founding the city, but the reverse sequence, guaranteed by the officers underlying Arrian's account, is the one that commands assent. First, he founded Alexandria. He marked out the walls personally and indicated where the main buildings were to be, including one dedicated to a goddess with an Egyptian feel to her, Isis. He had done this already in part because the city would be open to the trade and imports of the Mediterranean.

The foundation walls of Alexandria were remarkably big. Alexander meant it to be huge, a big statement that would grow glorious in his name. It was to be a Greek cultural masterpiece—and it remained so for centuries.

After marking out the walls, Alexander and a select body marched west to the coast of Lybia and turned in on a desert route into the Siwah oasis.

Arrian and his officers imply Alexander had an element of uncertainty about his parentage, directly about his begetting by his father, and it was to find the truth that he went to the oracle in the desert.

There is the outline too of his retained publicist, Callisthenes, and his description of the event. According to Callisthenes, Alexander left for the desert in rivalry to two great Greek heroes, Perseus and Heracles, both close kin to the god Zeus. A rivalry with Greek heroes could have been part of Alexander's public spin at the time, but why go so far into the desert?

At the simplest level, the fame of the oracle at the Siwah oasis would have naturally drawn him, as it would be his last chance to encounter a Greek god and pose a Greek oracular question before returning for the final showdown with the Persian king.

With a small group of followers, Alexander set inland on an extremely dangerous and challenging route. He arrived at last at the oasis after several adventures. It is told that the priest, the prophet of the oracular shrine of Ammon, who Callisthenes presents as Zeus, expressly greeted Alexander as the son of Zeus.

It is clear from the officers' accounts that Alexander never revealed the other questions he may have put to the oracle.

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A modern view of the Oracle of Ammon in Siwah Oasis in northwestern Egypt. The vast expanse of the oasis is indicated by the inset image, which shows an aerial view of the area comprising the Oracle.

The priest would have heard that Alexander was the new ruler of Egypt, and in the Greek world, Ammon was Zeus. In Egypt, the pharaoh was regarded as the divine, god-like begotten son of Ammon. So the priest greeted Alexander as "son of Zeus." Alexander then went on and posed to the oracle questions that he never revealed directly.

Alexander, whose mind had been alerted to the possibility of descent from the gods by his mother, arrived in a remote Egyptian oasis to consult the gods and was greeted by the priest there as nothing less than the begotten son of a god.

It would strike him, at least, as an omen, a confirmation of everything Olympias had been suggesting. It put him on the status of the old Homeric heroes. It did not make him a god outright, but it made him a special figure.

The Vulgate claims to know that Alexander asked the oracle if he had punished his father's murderers, whether he was invincible, and other questions—seemingly pure guesswork by the Vulgate.

Only when Alexander, years later, was down the river Indus, coming out onto the Indian ocean, preparing to sail homewards—he thought he was at the edge of the world, the error being in Aristotle's inaccurate sense of geography—was Alexander found carrying out elaborate religious offerings in accordance with the instructions of the oracle at Ammon. Alexander only visited Ammon once, so these rituals must refer to something Alexander had asked at the oasis.

It could be argued that Alexander, age twenty-five, had asked the oracle which gods and goddesses he should honor when he got to the end of the world—he would have been asking this *before* the daunting showdown with Darius. What confidence!

After leaving the oasis, Alexander may have taken the most difficult inner route, typical Alexander, back to the Egyptian capital city of Memphis. Supported by the gods, declared the begotten son of Zeus, Alexander must have felt invincible. From there, he left Egypt, in spring 331 BC, and returned back to Tyre.

The Egyptian interlude is hugely important. Alexander saw cities of enormous scale. He found himself confirmed, in some way not defined, as the son of Zeus.

At Tyre, Alexander waited, putting on games and theatrical shows to entertain the army. He divided the army into two groups in anticipation of the battle, one group called Persians and the other Greeks, and staged a mock battle. What he wanted was for the Persian king to arrange his troops on the perfect battle pitch, and when he was there, waiting, only then would Alexander, with forty-seven thousand troops, turn eastward, convinced he would win with one fell swoop.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why might the oracle at Ammon have greeted Alexander as the "son of Zeus"?
2. What do the elaborate rituals Alexander carried out at the Indian Ocean indicate about the question he may have posed to the oracle at Ammon?

Suggested Reading

Fox, Robin Lane. *Alexander the Great*. New York: Penguin, 2004 (1973).

Other Books of Interest

Hölbl, Günther. *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*. New York:, Routledge, 2001.

Lecture 7

Victory at Gaugamela

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Robin Lane Fox's *Alexander the Great*, chapters 16, 17, and 18.

Alexander had been corresponding with the Persian king, who had made previous peace offers to him. After Issus, even, in 332 BC, Darius had sent ambassadors who offered Alexander the hand of Darius's daughter in marriage, ten thousand talents, and all the territory as far as the Euphrates. We are told that Alexander's elderly officer, Philip's man, Parmenion, said, "I would accept if I were you, Alexander." To which Alexander replied, "So would I, if I were Parmenion."

Alexander declined the offer.

Gaugamela

Alexander had warned Darius that his aim was to be the king of Asia, and it was to him as king of Asia that Darius should rescind if he wanted mercy.

News carried that Darius's army was moving into position, and Alexander marched east by a well-supplied northern route, not unduly fast, inland for several hundred miles, crossing the Euphrates and then the fast-flowing Tigris.

It seemed almost too fortunate to be true that the Tigris crossing in particular went unopposed. And yet Darius believed he had such a vast force that it was his chance to squash once and for all the invader on a battlefield of his own choosing. Darius had been distributing traps and hooks and snares on the open ground before what would be his front line to stall Alexander's cavalry during a full-frontal charge.

Alexander was slightly misled by reports from Persian captives about Darius's whereabouts. Tension was certainly rising as the two armies approached in late September. The Persian king had marched north of Babylon, up beyond the ancient city of Arbela, to a hill still known as Tell Gomel ("camel's hump"), Gaugamela, the great battlefield, before it, in what is the north of modern Iraq.

In the last twenty years, there have surfaced inscribed tablets in cuneiform script of records of day-by-day events kept ultimately for astronomical reasons by scribes working in Babylonian tradition, under Persian rule.

Fragments survive from the hundreds of years in which these tablets were compiled. But amazingly, historians have the fragmentary account through the eyes of participants on the Persian side for the months of September and October, the occasion of Gaugamela.

In the Persian camp, during the days before, there had been anxiety and nervousness. Nor were Alexander's troops immune either. Just before the battle, Alexander, for the only time in his career, made a sacrifice to the divinity Fear.

The army units had come from far and wide, from as far as India—there were a few elephants even. Darius had summoned all the satraps in the eastern portion of the vast Persian empire.

But there was one great weakness. This vast army had never fought as a unit or trained professionally together. They had been summoned as a series of localized regiments and thrown together for the purpose.

Alexander went out on reconnaissance, overlooking the grand army, one hundred and seventy thousand perhaps the minimum.

Alexander arranged his battle line with the basic tactic of his father Philip in mind. The decisive strike would be on the right wing, led by himself at the head of the Companion Cavalry. The center once again would be held by the Shield Bearers, and in the middle would be the sarissa-bearing phalanx. It would be for Parmenion to hold the left.

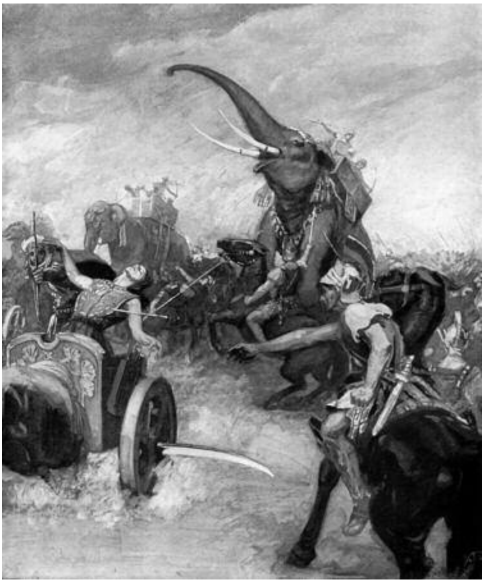

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Illustration depicting some of the fighting at Gaugamela, based on a watercolor by August Petrtyl, 1909.

There was a certain amount of anxiety about the strategy, and Parmenion was said to have gone to Alexander and suggest that it might be better to take advantage of surprise and attack by night. Alexander memorably replied, "Alexander does not steal his victories."

The men trusted Alexander. He called together his unit commanders to present strategy, and then they passed it down the chain. The Greek sources even say that Alexander stayed up until midnight working on battle plans and was so confident the next morning that he overslept and had to be woken by his officers.

Quite unlike Issus, Alexander was out in open territory on a flat plain. But Alexander artfully added surprises and reinforcements in the basic line pattern with which the Macedonians were familiar. On the right, among an apparent cavalry unit, Alexander concealed a number of trained infantry, some of them slingers and archers, and this infantry would thus be screened from approaching Persian horsemen.

Alexander organized a second line behind the main phalanx as a reserve so that it could face about and protect the phalanx if surrounded by cavalry or attacked in the rear.

The essential maneuver Alexander would play was the classic one invented by Philip. His cavalry would set out toward the right at an angle, and as the Persian line stretched out to cover them, the cavalry would cut back in toward the center and go straight for the gap that was opening.

Darius had seen these tactics and may not have dreamt that Alexander would repeat them when faced with an army of such scale.

So the shock and awe of the cavalry would break through and might even capture Darius, and then the phalanx would follow up into the broken ranks, and the Macedonians would have to hope that the left wing would hold.

The truth of Gaugamela seems to be that Alexander's highly trained troops were each worth two hundred or more of the assembled troops, who had never fought as a coherent whole.

When battle was engaged, among the Persians' traditional weapons were chariots with scythes on their wheels, very dangerous and apparently terrifying.

But the Greeks were used at that point to parting ranks and allowing the chariots to pass through harmlessly, and they in turn could then hurl javelins and missiles at the drivers.

There was immense bravery on Alexander's right wing, where units of cavalry served almost as decoys to draw the Persian cavalry over to them.

A heavy attack began, and only then did Alexander himself, after releasing the surprise of the infantry concealed among the cavalry, begin the classic charge to the right, and then angled back to the left.

Alexander's troops broke through and found themselves approaching the center of a long Persian line in which Darius was in his chariot.

Alexander took a shot at Darius, missed, so it is told, and hit the chariot driver instead. Darius fled, and just as at Issus, the departure of the king and his entourage was the turning point.

Elsewhere on the field, it was extraordinarily difficult. The weight of the scythian cavalry had apparently outflanked the Macedonians and had even gotten into the Macedonians' important baggage way back behind the line.

The phalanx had advanced, but part of it had split. Some of it was able to reform, sarissas all around, and weather the storm. On the left, Parmenion was exposed to very heavy pressure and could not fully cope with it. The histories tell that just as Alexander had engaged in pursuit of Darius, he received a messenger from Parmenion with the news that it was impossible for Parmenion to hold out and that Alexander must come back to protect that side.

Darius escaped and took a northerly route off the battlefield, up to Hamadan, and got over the mountain tracks. But once off the battlefield, his army tended to drift away.

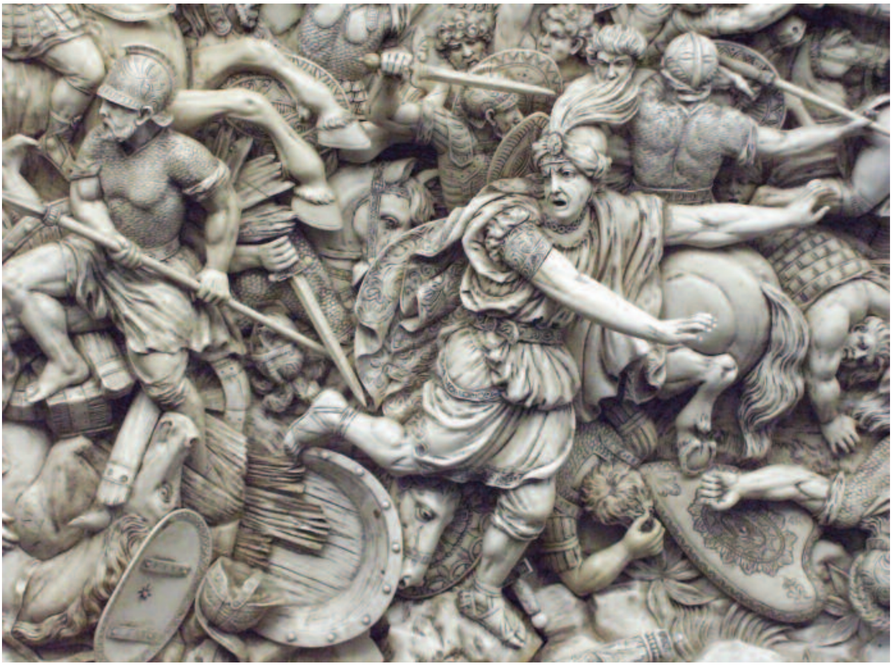
The Aftermath

There must have been massive slaughter. Within days, Alexander had to leave because of the smell and fear of disease from all the rotting corpses.

Parmenion was rescued, and as before, Alexander was immensely solicitous to all those who had fallen. It was a spectacular victory, because now every province under Darius's rule had seen that the king was defeated by a young invader of superior courage and military force.

On the field, people simultaneously began calling Alexander the king of Asia. The Persian kings did not describe themselves as such, but Alexander had a far wider idea of where Asia was going to end.

Off the battlefield, Alexander sent messengers south, down the river, toward the great city of Babylon, promising respect for the gods, for the great temple. The army regathered and marched down to approach the famous glittery tiles on the outer walls of Babylon.



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Detail of Darius taking flight at Gaugamela as Alexander's cavalry breaks through the Persian line. The Battle of Gaugamela, ivory relief sculpted in the eighteenth century by an unknown sculptor, was inspired by Charles Le Brun's painting on the same subject.

The Roman historian Curtius described him as arranging his army in battle order as he approached, but he was received and greeted by a professional delegation of leading Babylonians. The previous Persian satrap, a man chosen for connections in the area, Mazaeus, had agreed to surrender, the obvious option after defeat—and Persian rule had not been popular.

Alexander received a conquering hero's welcome. Of course, the Babylonians were scared and wanted things to work out without bloodshed.

Alexander's officers tell that Alexander ordered the rebuilding of the temple of Bel-Marduk, what is thought of now as the Tower of Babel, which the Persian king Xerxes had destroyed. Alexander rebuilt other shrines as well.

Alexander did not stay long in Babylon. The aim was to one by one take over the palaces that Darius's flight had left in its wake.

Susa was one of the symbolic centers of the Persian empire, famous for many generations. The satrap, the Persian governor of Susa, followed the example of the satrap of Babylon and surrendered.

Alexander thus would allow these satraps to retain power, with a parallel Macedonian force, upon surrender. He thus sped up his advance, which would have been slowed greatly if he had had to lay siege to those cities.

It was in Susa, so it is told, that Alexander sat on the throne of the Persian kings.

Darius was still at large, and a problem arose: Alexander had been presenting himself as the punisher of Persian outrages. But he then had to rule as the successor of Darius, and the two things became incompatible. This incompatibility showed clearly as he marched to take the home province of the Persians. There was almost a reversal as Alexander was ambushed at the gates of Persia and was very nearly caught short by a last stand of commanders still marshaling local troops.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why didn't Darius attack Alexander as he crossed the Euphrates and Tigris rivers?
2. What innovations did Alexander introduce into his lines before the battle at Gaugamela?

Suggested Reading

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Other Books of Interest

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Lecture 8

Court Style and Conspiracy

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Robin Lane Fox's *Alexander the Great*.

The first priority in spring 330 BC was to capture Darius. These were crucial months in the definition of Alexander's role and his aims for the next six years.

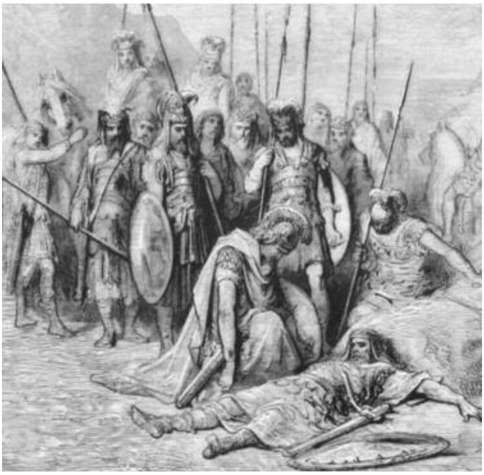
His Enemy Dead at His Feet

Alexander headed north from Persepolis, pausing at the modern site Hamadan, and it was there, from the eyewitness accounts of the officers used by Arrian, that Alexander disbanded the Greek allies who had been serving under the previous campaign slogan of punishing the wrongs the Persians had inflicted on Greece in 480. The reason: Alexander was going on to try to capture King Darius, so how could he be seen to both punish the Persians and continue beyond the point where that punishment ended?

Think of Alexander's many roles: In Macedon, he was a king. In Greece, he was the leader of the sworn Greek alliance. In Egypt, he was a pharaoh. In Persia, he was being regarded as a potential king. How could he keep all these aspects in harmony? Something had to break.

News reached Alexander that Darius was being increasingly abandoned by his officers, who were ahead of him on an extraordinarily swift gallop. Alexander rode as fast as he could, guided by informants, with a small group of select Macedonians, and he eventually came across an abandoned wagon. Upon investigating the surroundings, King Darius was found to have been stabbed and abandoned by his retinue of followers.

Alexander had his moment of triumph, his enemy dead at his feet, but what he did was put his own cloak over the dead body, and he ordered the body taken away for respectful burial.



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Darius dead at Alexander's feet.

There was a long tradition in the era after Alexander's of kings respecting each other's dead bodies on the battlefield, but to respect the body of the Persian king of the hated Persian empire was a hint that Alexander's self-presentation was beginning to shift.

As Alexander pushed into the forests and mountains by the Caspian Sea, various of Darius's nobles and former attendants surrendered and were taken on in Alexander's own entourage. At the same time, some of the brothers of his concubine Barsine surrendered and joined the court.

There was at that point a cluster of Persians around Alexander, and Alexander began to develop a separate court style for them. Traditionally, the Persian king, unlike the Macedonian king, was protected by ushers who regulated access to the king. Macedonian monarchy had been more free and easy. There could be audiences with the king, and the king could be seen on the battlefield. It was more a "first among equals."

Alexander's evolving ruling style of majesty with a supernatural dimension was something the Persian courtiers would look for and expect in a king, quite contrary to the more open style of monarchy to which Alexander was used.

One must also think of the view of the non-Greek speakers, the barbarians living in Asia, which Alexander would have heard years before from his great Greek tutor Aristotle, who concluded that the barbarians in Asia ranked as slaves by nature and were not fully rational. This was an extreme view, partly encouraged by the Greek view that the Persian terms for social hierarchy and the superiority of nobles and kings meant that they were referred to by Persian words that the Greeks rather excessively translated as "slaves." And they regarded free individual Persians as slaves of the social structure. There was the stereotype of the Persian barbarian—they were soft, prone to emotion, and lost in wine, harems, and luxury.

An Evolving Court Style

Alexander was urged to rule over the Persians as a despotic king. Aristotle never imagined that a king would have an inclusive monarch in whom Persians would be treated as equals beside Greek speakers. And yet this was what Alexander began to institute.

Alexander adopted the white tunic with the purple edge that Darius had been seen wearing. He never wore trousers (as did the Persians) or the famous upright crown. But he did take a diadem, a ribbon, that he wore around his Macedonian hat, and he restricted the diadem to be worn only by himself, as king. This became a symbol of royalty for all the successors who took the title of king, and it persisted even on the coinage of Alexander's successors for more than two hundred years.

Though it was an attempt to shift the court style to something more familiar to Persians, it was important that its use was not an exact copy of Persian practice. In the Persian court, the diadem had been allowed to all the royal relatives, who might number in the hundreds.

So it was a composite monarchy, still basically in the Macedonian style, with touches of respectful Persian color, and when Alexander was in audience, receiving inevitably the petitions and requests and disputes, access to him was regulated in the old way.

There was a Persian social practice known in the Greek world as *proskynesis*, either bending slightly forward and blowing a kiss to the king, slightly bent forward, or going down and paying homage on bended knees or face downwards. This was quite alien to the traditions of a free Greek. In Greece, this gesture was paid, but only to the gods. But in Persia, it had been a social custom.

Macedonian observers were highly surprised by this. If one was not a noble in Persian custom he was expected to get down and grovel to be allowed the king's attention. This struck Macedonian observers as particularly ridiculous. There was no way Alexander's officers, who had grown up with him, were going to go down and crawl around on hands and knees in front of a man who had shared their school days.

So there was a double court style where we are told that Alexander would stamp his letters destined for Asia with King Darius's existing seal, an image the satraps would be familiar with.

There was much moralizing in the ancient sources—partly under Roman influence—about the change of dress, but it was still a mixed style.

Alexander also took into his inner circle an increasing number of Persian noblemen from the past. Interpreters would have been active. Intercommunication wasn't easy, and already was heard of Macedonians taking on Asian women as their concubines and mistresses. So it was beginning to acquire a multiethnic dimension. But at this stage there was no close incorporation of the peoples into mixed units.

Persian units were used in the battle line increasingly, but in separate brigades. This would also affect social interrelations off the battlefield. Though the expedition and army were increasingly employing people of different ethnicities, they were not yet combined.

The question of money was also fundamental. When Alexander disbanded those soldiers from Greece he offered any who wished to reenlist a bonus and higher pay. The capture of the great cities had made Alexander incomparably rich. Money became one of his great weapons, and he employed it with a great generosity. But at the same time Alexander's mints and strikers of bullion into coin were increasingly issuing coin types with the imagery of the Greek gods. Alexander's money became familiar in Asia in a way that had not been anywhere near as pervasive in the role of the Persian kings, who had concentrated rather on the issue of heavier gold. Alexander deployed a greater range of denominations and types, paying his army in cash.

The coin types familiarized people with the fact that it was a new age.

Alexander, like a Persian king, also distributed robes of honor to some of his close companions. But on the whole, still, it was the Greco-Macedonian monarchy known under Philip, with slight allusions to the Persian practice of dress.

The constant presence of a quantity of plunder and the giving of significant contributions to the troops at crucial moments was an important reinforcement of Alexander's position.

Alexander announced that he was going to punish not the Persians, but the Persian murderers of Darius. He was presenting himself as the due heir to the dead Persian king, and he set off east after the Iranians who were supposed to be responsible. Among them was Bessus, who had taken a royal title, calling himself Artaxerxes and wearing his headdress upright in the style of a king.

A Lapse in Judgment

Alexander, when he passed into the province of Aria, founded a new city called Alexandria, the first certain Alexandria since the one in Egypt, a reminder that it was Alexander's kingdom.

Alexander had reappointed in this area a satrap, Satibarzanes, who had been involved in the murder of Darius, but who had been able to acquire a pardon by his willingness to surrender to Alexander.

Alexander marched south into the hot, harsh province of southeast Iran, his aim to engage in a southward loop, come up through modern Afghanistan, cross the Hindu Kush mountains, and go straight for Bessus, who had settled on the far side. It was a bold strategy, but a problem arose.

Satibarzanes turned on Alexander and rebelled, mustering resistance in Alexander's rear of people in the province of Aria. This has raised questions of Alexander's judgment. Satibarzanes was untrustworthy and should not have been appointed. It meant the army had to turn around and fight a particularly tough battle to cope with the rebellion.

The First Conspiracy

The first major conspiracy reported against Alexander in the course of his reign involved the killing of significant officers in the high command. It marked a clear move away from a previously dominant group in Alexander's court, and it was the end of the son of Parmenion, Philotas, and the death of Parmenion himself—Philip's greatest general, the officer who had valiantly held the entire left wing at Alexander's major battles at Issus and Gaugamela, one of the most important figures in the whole campaign, with a network beneath him of officers and retinues.

There is a detailed account in the history of the Roman Curtius, writing in the 70s AD, but clearly using a factual outline. He reshaped it, though, it seems, in terms of rather sinister machinations and denunciations that he would have been familiar with in Roman emperors of the first century AD. How much of it is true of the events of Alexander's monarchy—and how much Roman intrigue was projected back onto Alexander's time—cannot be known.

Factual detail might best be found in Ptolemy's history.

Parmenion's son Philotas received news from a group of conspirators that a plot was afoot to murder Alexander. Though informed on successive days, Philotas did not pass the word to Alexander.

There was a formal trial and Philotas was denounced in front of the assembled Macedonians, and he was fated to be executed.

It should be allowed that many in Alexander's court probably had a long-standing rivalry with Philotas, and there were undoubtedly jealousies.

Had Philotas actually been guilty and secretly wanted Alexander put to death? Did he sympathize with the aims of the shadow group? That is not known.

The death of Philotas was preceded by the death of his brother from natural causes. So two of the leading members of what might be called Parmenion's family faction had been removed.

At Alexander's succession, he had been obliged to favor the family of Parmenion, not entirely of his own choosing, because he needed Parmenion's support.

Once Philotas had been put to death, one could take no chances, and Alexander sent a detachment on camels across the intervening desert to Parmenion. A letter from Alexander was read, and Parmenion was stabbed to death. This was a turning point, the death of Philip's most significant general, a person Alexander had relied on to command half the army.

Under Macedonian terms, it was not surprising that once Philotas was accused, Parmenion would have to be killed too.

Cleitus appeared in the camp just after Philotas had been condemned. Other officers were arraigned, and one or two were actually acquitted. It was not simply a Stalin-like purge.

It is told that those who were grumbling and disorderly were put into a separate unit. As news of the trial broke, Philotas's kin fled for fear, but Alexander announced that the purge would go no further.

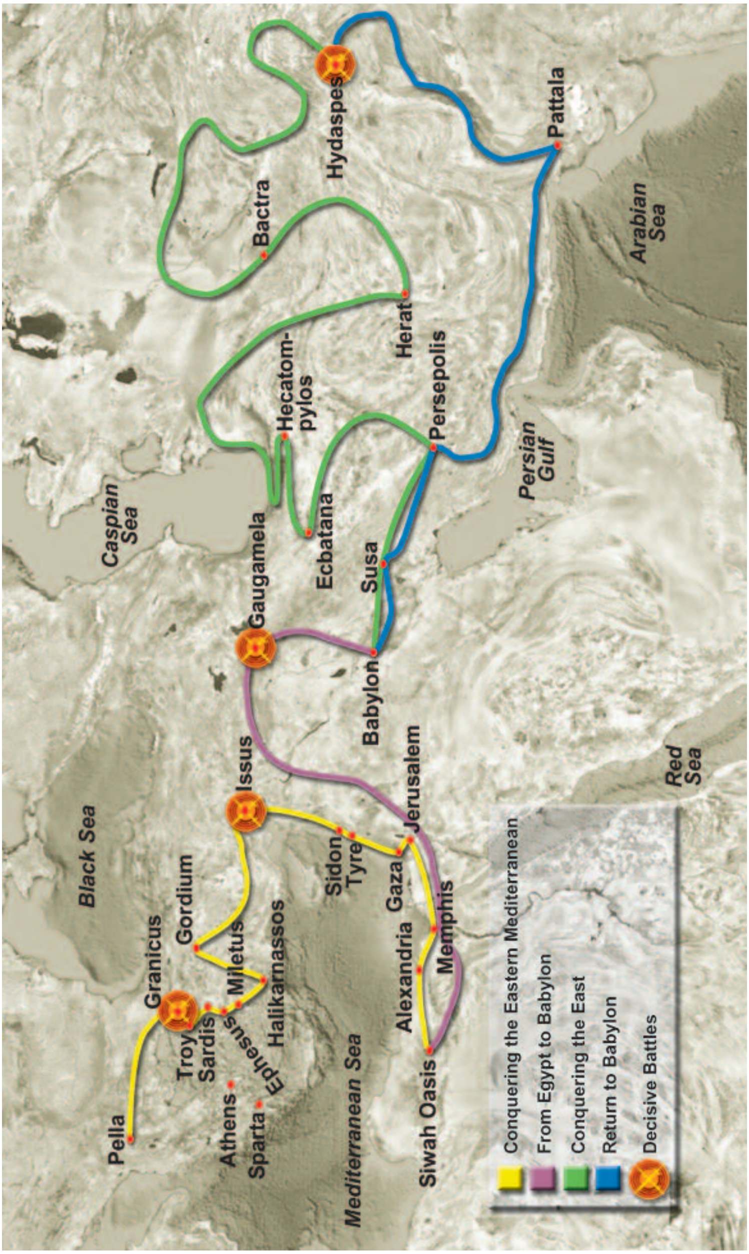
Philip had lived in a factional world in Macedon, where one could well imagine long-standing rivalries among families. But Philip had built up the crown and increasingly focused their loyalties on the king. And this had intensified in the years under Alexander. There was an intensification of the relationship between the king and his nobles and army that overrode the old patterns of more localized factions, and Alexander here was recognizing that the old world did not apply.

Philotas had commanded the Companion Cavalry. He had been put to death, so who would command this enormously important entity?

Alexander appointed first of all Hephaistion, but then split the job between Hephaistion and the former infantry commander, Philip's man, Cleitus.

This appointment could be seen as Alexander's wise attempt to steady the boat.

When the conspiracy broke, Alexander founded another town and named it Anticipation. This was telling the world that in relation to the purge, it was an occasion where he had to strike first.



Pella
Athens
Sparta
Troy
Sardis
Ephesus
Granicus
Miletus
Halikarnassos
Gordium
Black Sea
Mediterranean Sea
Issus
Sidon
Tyre
Gaza
Jerusalem
Alexandria
Memphis
Siwah Oasis
Babylon
Gaugamela
Susa
Ecbatana
Caspian Sea
Hecatom-pylos
Persepolis
Persian Gulf
Herat
Bactra
Hydaspes
Pattala
Arabian Sea
Red Sea
Conquering the Eastern Mediterranean
From Egypt to Babylon
Conquering the East
Return to Babylon
Decisive Battles

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A simplified map showing the routes and major battles fought by Alexander the Great and his armies from 335 to 323 BC.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. How did the court styles of the Macedonians and Persians differ?
2. Why had Parmenion to be killed?

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Lecture 9

Homogeneity

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Robin Lane Fox's *Alexander the Great*.

The deaths of Philotas and Parmenion were a turning point. Alexander had lost a whole family of commanders. The underlying conspiracy might owe something to Alexander's mistake—the appointment of Satibarzanes, who promptly rebelled, all indicative of a feeling among some Macedonians that Alexander had put Persian satraps in position of power that could have been better filled by Macedonians.

The World of Previous Myth

After the conspiracy, Alexander moved southeastwards toward the well-supplied, fertile valley of the Helmand River, in what would now be southern Afghanistan. There, he showed the two sides of his monarchal style. He favored a group of tribesmen locally on stories that they had benefited the great King Cyrus back in the sixth century BC. Alexander was behaving like the loyal heir of the Persian kings.

At the same time, Alexander founded another Alexandria, Alexandria-in-Arachosia. From excavations and surveys, there had already been previous occupation for many centuries on the site, and nearby, there had been a Persian fort.

The new Alexandria stood grander and on a more beautifully planned scale beside a previous Persian outpost—it was a strategic siting, but the name also proclaimed a new ruler and a different style.

Alexander engaged in an extraordinarily bold mountain ascent to catch Bessus, who was calling himself Artaxerxes, by surprise in the lands beyond the fabled Hindu Kush mountains.

Early in the year 329, after Alexander's remarkable mountain crossing, Bessus's supporters were so astonished that Alexander was upon them so quickly that Bessus was abandoned, and within weeks, Bessus was captured.

The area beyond the Hindu Kush mountains was to be enormously important in Alexander's government and the reign of his successors. It was there that Alexander concentrated more of his new settlements than anywhere else in the entire range of his conquests. He founded, for instance, Alexandria of the Caucasus, not far from modern Kabul—or so it is thought; the site has never been definitively established.

But why did he call it the Caucasus? The answer is that he and his men had no general global map and they believed that the Hindu Kush mountains were a sort of eastern extension of the Caucasus mountains, which of course are far farther to the west.

Alexander kept with him surveyors who counted out distances step by step on their travels, but the overall relationship of the landscape was still hazy in this time.

Alexander and his men were also encouraged to believe that they were far out of the range of any Greek army, treading in the world of previous myth. They believed they had found the sites where Zeus had imprisoned the Titan Prometheus, who had dared to steal the gift of fire and deliver it to man.

There was a cluster of Alexandrias, known particularly from Diodorus, which were founded in the valleys controlling the routes in the general region of Kabul.

Alexander marched on and was able, with help from Ptolemy, sent on an advance expedition, to capture Bessus. The last rebel pretender had been rounded up.

Alexander's treatment of him was significant. He ordered, in the Persian fashion, that Bessus's nose and ears should be cut off and that he should be tried. By inflicting this rather gruesome punishment, Alexander made the point that Bessus was a rebel against the real Persian king.

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Hindu Kush Mountains, Afghanistan

The soaring peaks of the Hindu Kush dwarf a village along the route traditionally thought to have been followed by Alexander the Great in the spring of 329 BCE when he led his army from the Kabul Valley through the Khawak Pass (elevation 12,625 feet). Inset: A satellite view of the Hindu Kush system.

The following spring, Alexander fanned out, wanting to go at least as far as the Steppe Desert, and at least equal the accomplishment of King Cyrus.

Alexander founded another Alexandria on the site of Cyrus-the-furthest and called it Alexandria-the-furthest.

Alexander was faced with his first major rebellion of the tribesman. He was diverted by a serious uprising led by Spitamenes, the local tribal chieftain, and Alexander had to spend at least the next year fighting in separate mobile detachment groups to stamp out the opposition.

Eventually, Spitamenes was caught, and his head was cut off. The successes against the rebels interrelated with important changes in Alexander's army and also in the royal style, which led to conspiracies and opposition against Alexander in his own entourage.

Roxane and a Fatal Party

In the winter of 329–28, Alexander received a large number of reinforcements from Macedon. In the campaigns the following spring against the rebels, there were divisions of the army operating in separate groups in a much more pronounced way than before. They were led by the previous commanders of infantry divisions. It seemed Alexander had opted for a system of divisional commanders, enabling the army to move in separate operations on various fronts to cope with the spreading rebellion before him.

There was more flexibility, but still, in so far as troops from western Iran were being used, they were being brigaded separately beside Alexander's own Macedonian and Thessalian-Greek cavalry. There was no integration.

On a siege, Alexander captured a father, Oxyartes, and daughter, Roxane, who Alexander took captive. It is told that Roxane danced for Alexander at a banquet—and enchanted him.

Alexander fell in love—or lust—and he married her. It is easy to say that, after a revolt, it was a good idea to marry a representative of the conquered people. But there is reason to pause. This was Alexander's first marriage. He had never married a Macedonian woman. He had kept Barsine only as his mistress, and by marrying Roxane, their son, a potential heir to the kingdom, would not be fully Macedonian.

It might have been a misstep, for Alexander could simply have taken Roxane as his mistress. Barsine was pregnant with a child who would be called Heracles, and at this point, she was probably dismissed. The son, however, would return to play a role in the struggles of Alexander's successors, twelve years after Alexander's death.

The marriage was not exactly what Macedonians had expected, and during these difficult years, there were three outbursts of opposition to Alexander. The first came from his older officer, Cleitus, Philip's man, who had saved Alexander at the first battle in Asia. He had been appointed co-commander of the cavalry along with Hephaistion, after the plot of Philotas.

In winter 328, Cleitus was to be named the satrap of Bactria, an important job, but behind the lines. If Alexander was to march east, Cleitus would basically be left to win glory locally, and thus he may have resented the appointment.

There happened a famous, fatal party at which there was much drinking. At one point, Cleitus suddenly stood, and out poured all the grievances of the past years—probably. The speech of Cleitus is recorded in the Vulgate sources, but it is uncertain if there are hints of it from the officers' eyewitness reports. The impression one gets is that Ptolemy and Aristobulus, reflecting on what was to be the low point of Alexander's reign, tended to leave out the source of the quarrel.

The speech could have been the historical imagination of later authors, but it is easy to imagine Cleitus would attack Alexander for being too slavish, too fond of Persians, for adopting Persian customs, for claiming to be the begotten son of Zeus, for falling short of Philip. And that last might have been the flashpoint for Alexander. He called for his guards—and none of them moved. Alexander believed he was the victim of a plot in his own entourage—and this was not paranoia. Every Macedonian king was at risk of betrayal from insiders.

Cleitus continued, and Alexander, notoriously, grabbed a sarissa and ran Cleitus through—a dark and awful moment, a reminder of the wildness and potential savagery of Macedonian parties.

It was unforgivable, as Alexander himself knew, and he was said to have lain weeping for what he'd done. But it did not precipitate any sort of coup against him.

It is at this point even ancient authors attacked him morally. It was an outrageous act in which he'd lost control and essentially murdered one of his intimates.

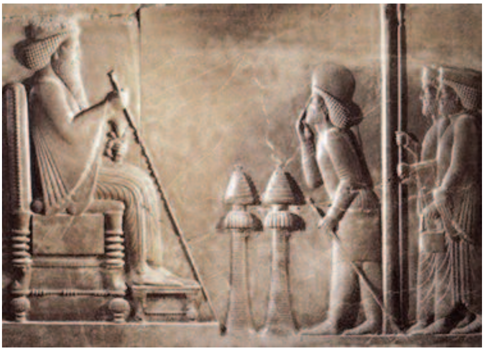
A Failed Experiment and Another Conspiracy

Without Cleitus, Alexander polished off the rebellion. Roxane was married. Afterwards, there was an experiment by Alexander in which he attempted to introduce the practice called *proskynesis*, either blowing a kiss toward the Persian king or going down on hands and knees in his presence—obviously not the Greek way.

Alexander summoned selected Macedonians to a special party, where he would try out whether or not *proskynesis* would be paid to him by some of his selected Macedonians and courtiers. The arrangement was that they would drink from a wine cup, make a kiss with their hands, and then go up to Alexander to receive a kiss. The kiss was significant. In Persian terms, it meant they were honored as equals, but it was also decided evidence that Alexander was not trying to encourage his own worship—gods, after all, are not expected to kiss their subjects.

What was happening was an attempt to replicate a social ceremony and apply it to all the court. Alexander was moving to establish more homogeneity, and it was a move in a Persian direction. The combination of blowing the kiss and receiving the actual physical kiss was never quite the Persian way.

Some of the officers did it, and then the turn of the cup came to Alexander's Greek historian, Callisthenes, and he refused to pay the gesture, which would strike him not as sacrilegious, but as slavish. Callisthenes said, when Alexander noticed it, "Very well, I go away, the poorer by a kiss."



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A Median official pays homage (*proskynesis*) to Darius I (521–486 BC) of Persia in this bas-relief from the principal audience hall at Persepolis (sixth- to fifth-century Achaemenid citadel), Iran.

The experiment was dropped, but Alexander was furious.

Not long after, a conspiracy broke amongst the young in the Macedonian court—the group who served Alexander as his royal pages, boys between the ages of twelve and sixteen.

There was a grievance. While hunting, one of the boys had speared a wild boar, taking a shot at it before Alexander himself. This was impudence, and the boy was flogged. The story is that the boy mustered a group of pages and they decided to kill Alexander on a night they were guarding his tent.

Alexander was saved because he stayed up so late drinking with his friends that he did not go back to bed that night until dawn, by which time the pages guarding his tent had changed, and they'd missed their chance. His life, then, was saved by an evening of massive drinking.

The pages were subsequently betrayed and arrested.

A great name was implicated too—none other than Callisthenes, the official historical advisor of the court of Alexander. Was he guilty? It is possible he went back in outrage after Alexander's experiment and convinced his pupils the king was degenerating into a tyrant and was no longer legitimate—that they must strike a blow for freedom.

Or it could have been an independent plot amongst the pages, and Alexander took his chance to get Callisthenes out of the way.

There are several different versions of Callisthenes's eventual death, or execution.

Alexander had faced a crisis after his attempt to take a Persian style of court a step further, and this was a move he did not try to repeat. It was an ill-judged experiment.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. In the area beyond the Hindu Kush mountains, why did Alexander name one of his settlements Alexandria of the Caucasus?
2. What was the outcome of Alexander's experiment with *proskynesis*?

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Lecture 10

Alexander in India

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Robin Lane Fox's *Alexander the Great*.

Alexander's two years in the area of Bactria on the far side of the Hindu Kush mountains, today's northern Afghanistan, left a real mark on the face of the region—new cities, new settlements, the establishment of a Greek-speaking hierarchy.

In the Footsteps of the Gods

The Persian kings had ruled in northwest India. With the invasion of India, therefore, Alexander was on one level completing the conquest of the Persian empire.

It was going to be a hard slog, but Alexander was helped by defections from rebellious groups within the Indian communities and by the arrival of the Indian Sandrocottus at Alexander's court.

In autumn 327, Alexander founded two townships on the edge of Afghanistan and sent one part of his army along the river valley by the direct route. Alexander, characteristically, took his troops up into the rough highlands, and his troops really felt that they were on the long-lost tracks of previous Greek gods and heroes.

There was a wonderful encounter in which envoys from one of the peoples in this mountainous area entered Alexander's presence and explained that their people were the long-lost people of the god Dionysus—the god so dear to Alexander's mother. Their claims were supported by their local vegetation: ivy, luxuriant greenery, and the vine, the source of wine, which Dionysus presided over.

After bitter fighting against hill tribesmen, Alexander was reunited with Hephaistion and his troops, who had pacified the valley, and they headed toward the stronghold of the local resistance.

Alexander's opponents congregated at a mountain stronghold. The campaign that followed was one of Alexander's most extraordinary sieges. The mountain was toweringly high, and his men were obliged to bridge over the wide ravines to reach the top of it—an astonishing feat. One of the things that urged the Macedonians on was a belief that the mountain had also been a stronghold of the Greek god Heracles.

They came down from the mountain into the great landscape below and the capital of Taxila. It was there that they paused to look at the nature of the Indian world into which they had moved.

Naked Wise Men

The Macedonians were acute observers of the externals they witnessed, but doubts can be cast on their interpretations of accompanying social customs.

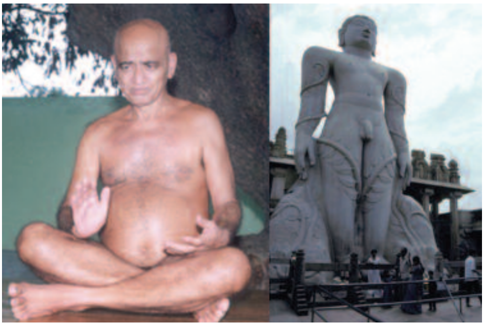
One of the customs Greeks always looked for were practices of marriage. In India, Greeks observed a practice that amazed them. They saw that older Indian men were married to significantly younger Indian women. They also learned that when the husband died, the wives would be put to death, some even burned to death on a bonfire along with their husbands.

The Greeks gleaned that in the past either marriages had been arranged and the girls had not been happy or they had married much older men. Unsatisfied, women ran off with younger lovers or even poisoned their older husbands. Therefore, the husbands introduced the rule that if they died, then the girls would be put on the bonfire too.

Of course, the practice is more plausibly attributable to the status of widows in a society that could not accommodate them.

Just outside the town of Taxila, reports reached the Greeks of naked wise men who were the source of local philosophy. Alexander sent a delegate out to see them, choosing the helmsman of his fleet, Onesicritus, who reported that he was told to take his clothes off if he wanted to hear their teaching. Onesicritus responded that the heat of the sun was so scorching that no one could have borne to walk on the ground, so he hesitated, and the oldest of the wise men excused him from removing his clothes.

It was also told that Alexander himself went to look at the wise men, and the wise men took a dried hide, placed it on the ground, and began to walk



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Left: Acharya Vidyasagar, a Digambara Jain monk in 2003. Right: The Gomatheswara at Shravanabelagola, India, sculpted ca. 978–993 AD.

Gymnosophists ("naked philosophers") is the name given by the Greeks to certain ancient Indian philosophers who pursued asceticism to the point of regarding food and clothing as detrimental to purity of thought. The term was first used by Plutarch in the first century CE, when describing an encounter by Alexander the Great with ten gymnosophists in Punjab. They were probably the Naga Sadhus, who are still in existence and are considered as devotees of Lord Shiva.

The Digambar Jain monks in India even today remain unclothed and have been identified as gymnosophists by some researchers. Xuanzang, the Chinese scholar, traveler, and translator who brought about the first interaction between China and India in the early Tang period, mentions having come across Digambar Jain monks in Taxila during his seventh-century CE visit to India, in the same Punjab region where Alexander first encountered the gymnosophists.

Source: Luniya, Bhanwarlal Nathuram. *Life and Culture in Ancient India: From the Earliest Times to 1000 A.D.* New Delhi: Lakshmi Narain Agarwal Publisher, 1978.

around it. As they did so, the center ballooned up, and then they walked off and sat down.

What they were dramatizing was that the king who walked around the exterior edges of his empire provoked trouble at the center—that Alexander should go back where he came from, in essence.

One of the wise men, Calanus, was free to abandon his way of life, and for two years he joined Alexander's troops.

To Alexander and his men, India was a source of extraordinary wonder. They tried to make sense of it by connecting it to the exploits of the god Dionysus, and Heracles too had a local variant.

The elephant could strike terror into Macedonians' hearts. They had to face a few elephants at Gaugamela, but the elephant was the supreme war arm of the Indians.

Alexander was headed for a clash with local rulers whose status in the Persian empire was uncertain. On one view, Persian rule had once extended right to the furthest of the five rivers, and thus Alexander never fully managed to leave the boundaries of the Persian empire.

It seems more likely that from Indus onward, Alexander had marched into independent territory where once upon a time the kinglets may have paid gifts and presents to the Persian king, but had never been part of a formal satrapy.

Porus and His War Elephants

Local excavation is badly needed for more insight, but what can be seen is that the Indians, as a group, were not a peaceful, idyllic society before Alexander arrived. They had long, deep animosities among their kingdoms, and Alexander's army was swung around and ordered to take sides and to participate in the various animosities.

Alexander was told by a friendly rajah, Ambhi of Taxila, that the local enemy was King Porus, whose kingdom lay just beyond the Jhelum river, to which Alexander headed and to where Porus was gathering his armies.

The mature genius of Alexander was shown in the battle against King Porus, his troops, and his vast array of war elephants. It was Alexander's masterpiece. It united so much—the flexibility of his battle line, his mastery of stratagems, deception, manipulation, those tricks that are so important in the ability of Greek generals.

Alexander spent a month giving the impression that he was about to cross the river Jhelum. When they did cross, they did so during a huge electrical storm, which made the maneuver extremely difficult, to say the least.

Porus made heavy use of war chariots (which after the heavy rains were prone to stick in the mud), excellent Indian archers with long bows, and above all elephants.

Warriors sat on the backs of the grand beasts, and they were drawn up in front of Porus's line, making a great blocking device.

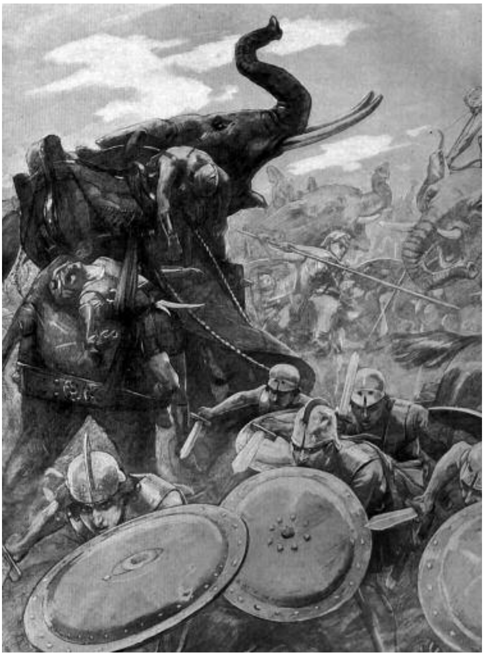
The fact that one cannot gallop head-on at a line of elephants helps to explain an extraordinary aspect of the battle, during which Alexander went on a great loop on the left-hand side. He seemed to go on a detour around and under the flank of Porus's army, and the reason was probably in part that a horse's natural instinct is to pull left when faced with elephants.

Elephants do not like being attacked in the flank, and they were panic-stricken if something came up on them from behind. The Shield Bearers, now in their sixties, were armed with special cutters, so as they engaged with elephants on the ground, the Macedonians set about either hamstringing the elephants or cutting their trunks off. It was an outrageous slaughter.

Porus continued fighting even after the elephants retreated, and Alexander himself was said to gallop toward him. Eventually wounded, Porus was said to have stopped fighting. Alexander asked him, "How would you like to be treated?"

To which Porus replied, "Like a king." And this was exactly what Alexander did. He reappointed Porus, having defeated him.

There was, however, a casualty. Alexander's supreme horse, Bucephalas, was fatally wounded. Alexander paid him a great mark of honor. He founded a city in the horse's name: Bucephala.



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A nineteenth-century depiction of war elephants attacking at the Battle of the Hydaspes (Jhelum) River.

Youthful Fury

Amongst all the slaughter, this is the amazing history of a young man. Alexander's strengths and weaknesses were massively those of youth—he was wildly impetuous, risky, and seemingly quite unconscious of the limits of ambition or of the dangers and risks he ran.

After the battle with Porus, Alexander continued to march on. His aim, much disputed, may have been to march through the plains of India to the river Ganges and beyond, where, he believed, lay the encircling outer ocean, the eastern edge of the world.

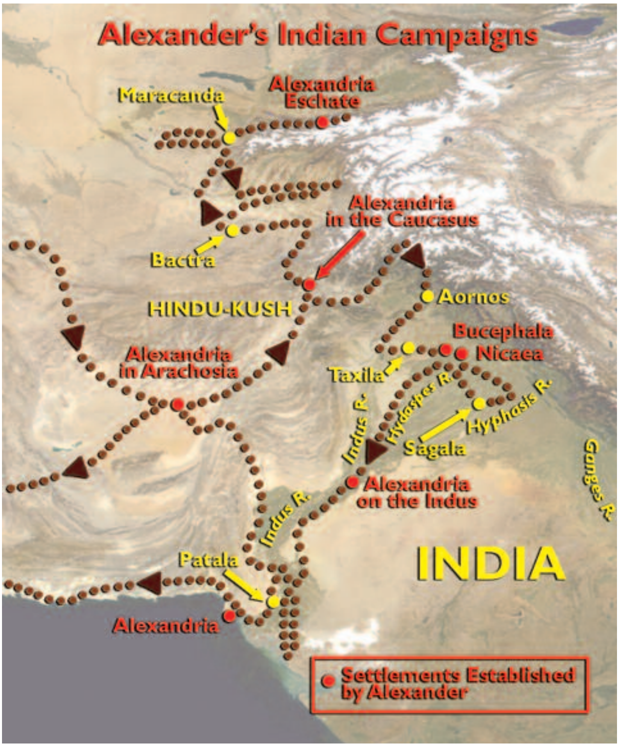
What was driving him? Partly Homeric rivalry with the hero Achilles. Partly he was on the trail of the heroes and gods, Heracles and Dinonysus in particular. But it might be guessed that it was for a supreme glory that once and for all would outdo even the glory of his father, Philip, and the father-son rivalry, provoked by the uneasy relations of Philip's last year, was an enduring part of Alexander's inner psychology and impulse.

On he marched, and they observed more of India's wonders—including bananas, which Alexander did not care for, the banyan tree, and peacocks. One local feature was the heavy monsoon rains that began in May/June of the regular Indian summer. The Greeks had no idea what the scope of the storms would be. The rains came relentlessly, rotting the armor, rotting the food, and causing the rivers to swell. And with the rain also came a veritable plague of snakes.

The Macedonians began to hear rumors of a huge kingdom awaiting them, with thousands of war elephants and hundreds of thousands of troops waiting down in the Ganges.

When Alexander and his troops reached the outer river, the men began to gather in groups and refused to march forward. Alexander cajoled the men, and they refused. He lost his temper and in a stupendous show of youthful fury he went into his tent in a rage for two days, and the troops began to boo him.

Alexander realized that he must stop and turn around. In the Vulgate, Alexander ordered statues of the gods to be built—the twelve Olympians—at the point where he turned around. And he also had beds and armor built with larger-than-life dimensions, so if anyone were to rediscover it, they would realize that a race of supermen had been there.


Alexander's Indian Campaigns
Maracanda
Alexandria Eschate
Alexandria in the Caucasus
Bactra
HINDU-KUSH
Aornos
Bucephala
Nicaea
Taxila
Alexandria in Arachosia
Indus R.
Hydaspes R.
Hyphasis R.
Sagala
Ganges R.
Alexandria on the Indus
INDIA
Patala
Alexandria
Settlements Established by Alexander

Background: © NASA

Source: Arrian. *Anabasis Alexandri* (*The Campaigns of Alexander*). Trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt. New York: Penguin, 1976.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What was meant by the Indian wise men's demonstration with the dried hide?
2. What military strengths were displayed by Alexander in his battle versus King Porus?

Suggested Reading

Fox, Robin Lane. *Alexander the Great*. New York: Penguin, 2004 (1973).

Other Books of Interest

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Stoneman, Richard. "Naked Philosophers: The Brahmans in the Alexander Historians and the Alexander Romance. " *Journal of Hellenic Studies*. Vol. 115, pp. 99–114. London: The Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, 1995.

Lecture 11

The Feared Makran Desert

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Robin Lane Fox's *Alexander the Great*.

Alexander had been forced to turn back from his ambition to reach the eastern end of the world. But there were other edges. What about the south?

Leading from the Front

Alexander had erroneously concluded from the sight of lotus plants and crocodiles in the river Indus that the river must have run round and joined the Nile in Egypt, where he'd seen similar flora and fauna.

There were no maps of the area. A Greek admiral had been sent to explore the Indus many centuries before, but nobody in Alexander's entourage fully understood that the Indian Ocean existed. Alexander had no clear idea where he was, but he was certainly not returning home with his tail between his legs. He had an enormous fleet and an army that numbered some one hundred and twenty thousand. This was the biggest army in ancient history, only rivaled by Trajan in the second century AD. And it was a multiethnic army. Many Indians had joined Alexander to fight rival Indian factions.

A number of Alexander's ships were smashed as they journeyed south, and from that point, most progress was on land.

The Indians told him that the most hostile people in the area were at Multan, and these people were preparing to oppose him. Alexander split his troops, left Ptolemy to bring the elephants behind him, and took twelve thousand men in a rapid movement against the Indians before they had a chance to oppose him.

Alexander penned them up in their home city, probably the site of Multan, and set about the siege, which nearly proved fatal for him.

After urging the men to bring up the scaling ladders and seeing them hesitate, Alexander grabbed a ladder himself and climbed onto a wall. Leading from the front, after all, was the mark of a Hellenistic Greek general. His men had not yet followed him, and Alexander, unbelievably, jumped down into the Indians' city and started setting upon anyone who came near him. In his actions one could clearly see what Achilles and the Homeric text meant to Alexander in terms of personal prowess.

One of the Indian archers hit Alexander with an arrow three feet long. It went into his chest. The news went out that he was down. His men came in and covered him, and the Indians were shown no mercy, having wounded the king.

Ptolemy, who was there, said that "air" or "spirit" as well as blood came out of the wound. Some believe that Alexander may have had a punctured lung.

The expectation would have to be that a lesser man, not so stupendously fit, would not have survived.

Word started to spread among the troops that Alexander had not survived, and that his death was being kept secret, but after a while, Alexander felt strong enough to make a public appearance. Alexander went by boat down the river to the troops' camp.

Alexander's ship pulled onto the bank and he held his hand up to the assembled crowd, which raised a great shout of joy. Some of the Shield Bearers began to bring a bed on which to carry him off the ship, but he refused and asked for a horse. When he was seen again, mounted on a horse, applause broke through the army. He approached his tent and dismounted, so the men could see him walk.

Alexander survived, but he must have been in considerable pain. There was no question of abandoning the conquests he was making down the Indus. He was still appointing satraps and settling Alexandrias.

But the opposition didn't end. This was not just Alexander's route home. These were provinces he intended to retain. Part of his opposition was rooted in the leadership of the Brahmins, and revolts intensified against the Macedonians.

Into the Desert

Casualty figures are exaggerated, but it would be possible to add them up and say two hundred and fifty thousand Indians died during the battles as Alexander moved down the Indus.

Modern historians believe Alexander, frustrated about turning home, was venting his fury on the local Indians and that his blood thirst was increasingly distressing the men. But this moral pattern is not evident in the available evidence.

Alexander went down to the outlet of the Indus into the Indian Ocean, what he thought was the outer ocean in the south of the world. It was at this point, summer 325, that he engaged in elaborate sacrifices—the ones he attributed to the oracular guidance of the god Ammon. Again, it did imply that the question he had asked Ammon was, "Which are the gods I should honor when I reach the edge of the world?"

In late summer 325, Alexander was preparing for a march home, which he knew would be extremely difficult. It emerged as perhaps the greatest catastrophe of his military record.

Alexander's plan was to march along the coastal route, back from the south of Indus, going westwards through the feared Makran desert, and then emerge in southeast Iran. This was an extraordinarily difficult undertaking.

Alexander was animated by a wish to rival heroes such as King Cyrus in the desert crossing and to be near the shores to be able to dig wells for the fleet and receive supplies from the fleet.

Alexander let go the weak and the feeble, because he knew the march would be a trial. There had never been a failure of logistical supplies on Alexander's entire march, which says a great deal about competence and the chain of command. Frequently, too, the army had profited from Persian nobles' habit of hoarding food and supplies for government or upper-class use.

Four months' supplies had been gathered for the exploration, the only explanation seeming to be that the supplies would be carried by the fleet.

Alexander marched westwards and the fleet was seemingly to follow and liaison with Alexander at the desert stretch. Alexander set out and the winds started blowing up the river Indus. In Nearchus's own account, it was impossible for him to set sail and catch up with Alexander.

Alexander entered the desert and had a choice of two routes. He could have opted for a northwestern route that was slightly milder. But he stayed by the shore, and he must have been hoping that by that point the fleet would have arrived and offloaded supplies.

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A portion of the Makran Coastal Highway (completed in 2003) is visible in the center right of this image. The highway winds through the inhospitable terrain between Karachi in the east of Pakistan and Gwadar on the Iranian border along the Arabian Sea. Temperatures in the arid climate have been recorded as high as 120°F in summer months.

Two days into the desert march and there was no sign of Nearchus and the fleet. At this point, Alexander tried to double inland to get onto the more fertile route. The whole plan had broken down, and it must have been a frightful moment.

There are atrocious stories of life in the sixty days or so that the troops marched through the desert. There were snakes, acutely poisonous plants that blinded the horses, and a flash flood that washed away women and Phoenician traders following behind.

The most detailed accounts of the march may have come from Nearchus himself, from the accounts of survivors.

There was an account of him turning away water during the march so as not to drink when his men could not—again an example of Alexander always wanting to be on the front line, not sequestered in comfort behind his men. There was nothing he expected his men to do that he was not prepared to take on himself.

Survivors

Alexander came out of the desert. How many people died? Historians cannot decide. Did Alexander lose three-quarters of the people with him? He certainly lost a large proportion of his cavalry—and they may have come through more easily than the infantry, let alone the camp followers. It may be that only a third of the people who marched into the desert came out on the other end.

Alexander arrived in Carmania. Because horses were scarce in that region, most of the people used donkeys, even for war. The war god was the only god that was worshiped, and they sacrificed donkeys to him. They were most aggressive. Nobody married until he had cut off the head of an enemy and delivered it to the king. The king then stored the head in the palace and minced up the tongue with flour, tasted it himself, and then gave the remains to the warrior to eat with his family.

There was, however, one local consolation. The ground was fit for growing grapes and the men could once again enjoy the pleasures of wine.

There are stories in the Vulgate that Alexander engaged in a Dionysian procession, but that seems too highly colored and should probably be taken with a grain of salt.

Alexander's historian Aristobulus does say that on the way home Alexander engaged in sacrifices for the victory over the Indians and the safe return of his men. But he had not conquered all the Indians he had hoped and many of the men had never returned. It must have been a bitter blow to his pride.

There was, even in Carmania, a typically Greek entertainment to raise the troops' morale: the theatre. On this occasion, famously, the entertainment took a particular turn, involving the eunuch, the Persian Bagoas, who had ridden with Darius and become Alexander's first Persian general—and his lover.

Prizes were awarded for dancing. Dressed in his garlands of honor after dancing brilliantly in the Persian style, Bagoas passed through the theatre and took the winner's place by Alexander's side.

The Macedonians applauded and shouted "Kiss the victor!" At last Alexander threw his arms around the eunuch and kissed him again and again.

Alexander was a man of strong sexual passion, whether it was Hephaistion, Barsine, Roxane, the future Persian wives he was to marry, various women on the march, or a eunuch.

After Makran

There are questions that cannot be fully answered. How many men were no longer with him? How many friends and close officers had died from what Alexander knew was a mistake?

To Alexander's relief, he had learned that Nearchus was safe and the fleet had in fact pulled through. He had been thinking that the only possible culprit for delaying the fleet was the satrap he had appointed in the land before entering the desert. Alexander had sent men to arrest the satrap, but the man had already died in a local skirmish—he was innocent of interfering with the fleet.

Alexander's disappearance at the edge of the world had raised doubts in the minds of those he had appointed to govern—some of them Darius's former satraps. There were reports of disloyalty, rebellion, and unrest while Alexander was away in India, and on his return, fourteen of the twenty-three satraps were showing signs of rebellion at the top.

There was a real threat, and Alexander's power had to be reasserted.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What was Alexander's plan for moving through the Makran desert?
2. What were the characteristics of the people in Carmania?

Suggested Reading

Fox, Robin Lane. *Alexander the Great*. New York: Penguin, 2004 (1973).

Other Books of Interest

Bosworth, A.B. *Alexander and the East: The Tragedy and Triumph*. Chapter 6. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Lecture 12

Alexander's Vision

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Robin Lane Fox's *Alexander the Great*.

Alexander was relieved to be reunited with Nearchus, but he was chastened greatly by the brutal losses during the march through the desert, and there was also turbulence among the governors in his empire.

Righting the Ship

The rebellious satraps had not mounted any organized opposition. In various provinces Iranian leaders, many appointed by Alexander even though they had previously served Darius, had taken the opportunity of his absence and rebelled.

Several of his officers had misbehaved and plundered the treasury—apparently not believing they would ever see Alexander again.

What was striking was how often fellow Iranians intervened on Alexander's orders, arresting rebellious Iranians and bringing them as a mark of favor to the returning king.

Some of the fourteen problem satraps had their governors deposed and replaced, often accused by their own subjects of malpractice and bad government.

The Macedonians themselves were no angels either, and a cluster of them had to be rounded up and put to death along with four hundred of their troops and assistants for ravaging and pillaging.

As Alexander marched west from Kirman into the homelands of the Persians who had ruled the previous Persian empire, he was obviously thinking about how to present himself locally. He came the king of Asia, rival of the respected former king, Cyrus. And yet he was the same man who had burned to the ground the great Persian palace at Persepolis and who had killed many of their families in the pitched battles at Issus and Gaugamela.

In early spring 324, Alexander made explicit public gestures to Persian sentiment. He was said to have expressed regret for the burning of Persepolis. Above all, he went out to the great plain outside Persepolis. At the tomb of Cyrus he found that the king's treasures were gone and the king's skeleton had been tipped onto the floor.

Alexander put Aristobulus in charge of the restoration and of finding those responsible. In the end, the culprit was a Macedonian.

The entrance to Cyrus's tomb is the one place someone can stand and be sure that he or she is standing in Alexander's footsteps.

Alexander moved on to Persepolis. He found there were accusations of the robbing of the royal tombs there, and in turn he arrested the satrap and had him deposed and put to death. In his place, he appointed a significant figure, Peucestas, the only Macedonian who had learned to speak Persian and had adopted Persian dress.

There were twelve arrests at the top of the provinces and new appointments were made to restore Alexander's rule and to restore order. One would have thought that with the uncertainty of Alexander's whereabouts it would have been the time to unite opposition, but the Persians could not regroup. It was as if without a real accepted Persian king from the dynasty, factions and local divisions would always divide them.

A Funeral and Mass Wedding

In early summer, Alexander processed on to Susa. It was there that a series of events occurred that brought out both a multiethnic tone and his plans for the future.

The first event was the amazing funeral for the Indian wise man, Calanus, who had been following the army since the days of Taxila. Calanus was old and failing, so in Indian style he went to the bonfire, steadfast in the face of the flames. He was very well liked among the Macedonians, and Alexander had a difficult time watching.

Calanus said to Alexander, famously, "You can move bodies from one place to another, but the soul, you can never compel."

In Calanus's honor, Alexander held an extraordinary celebration. There was a competition to be held with unmixed wine, because the Indians were so fond of it. The money prizes were enormous, but of the drinkers who competed, thirty-four died immediately and another six only survived to die shortly thereafter in their tents. The winner downed three gallons of wine, but even he died after four days.

At Susa, Alexander amazed his contemporaries by putting up a list in which he specified marriages for selected officers. There is no real precedence for the scale of this in history. It was not just the king intermarrying a couple of nobles. A list of at least ninety-two went up of the high-ranking Macedonians and other Greeks who were to marry Iranian girls.

There was to be a vast celebration, including Alexander, one of the bridegrooms himself, and all the brides and grooms would be entertained, along with a huge list in the most spectacular tent.

Ninety-two bridal suites were made ready in the same place. The hall was decorated extravagantly. The wedding was celebrated for five successive days, in the Persian style, a mark of respect for the brides.

Conspicuous among the entertainers were the conjurers from India. There were songs, recitations, players on the lute, flute, and lyre. Actors from the god Dionysus's company pleased Alexander with lavish presents. Tragedies and comedies were performed.

Alexander himself married the youngest daughter of King Darius and also a daughter of the previous king, Artaxerxes—again repeating the pattern of polygamy known during the reign of King Philip and simultaneously marrying both sides of the old royal Persian base. Above all, he married Hephaistion to another of Darius's daughters, so when they both had children, the children would be cousins.

Alexander also distributed presents to members of his army who turned out to have already married Persian women. This was Alexander clearly demonstrating his approval of integration. It was a massive gesture of inclusion.

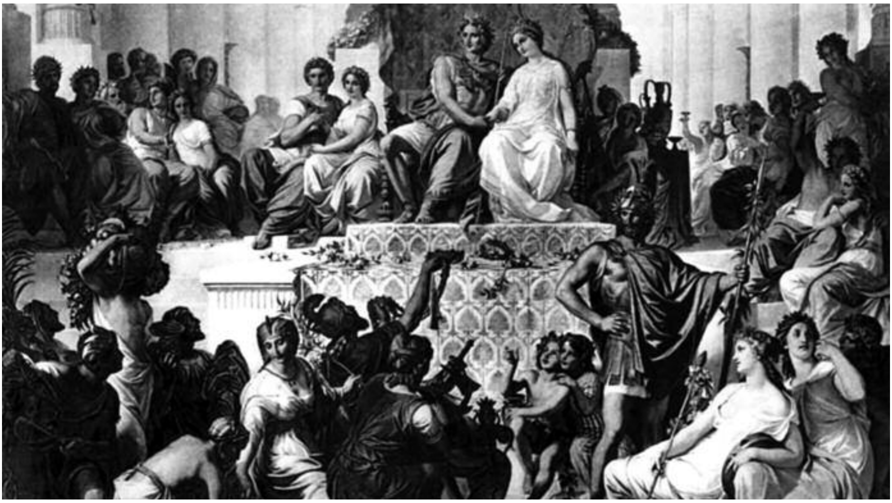
A few eyebrows may have been raised, but to sweeten it, Alexander, who was enormously richer than any Greek had ever been, announced that he would pay off all the debts among his army.

The Successors

Before Alexander invaded India, he had ordered satraps to recruit and train thirty thousand boys in Greek speech and reading and in the arts of war.

It was at Susa that the satraps arrived with the thirty thousand men and word spread that Alexander was calling them the "successors." The old Macedonians had actually fought against these boys' fathers, and the king was privileging the boys as the generation of the future.

They were a clear statement that Alexander saw the future as a mixed future. This was a move toward an inclusive court and army, which would



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An early twentieth-century illustration depicting the weddings at Susa.

draw on all available people. These would be men beholden to Alexander, away from any other ties of loyalty—a new age and a new monarchy. And of course they were being trained for new campaigns.

Despite the gifts, it rankled the old Macedonians. Was this what they had fought for all these years? To see not just themselves in positions of power, but the Persians they had opposed put into the elite troops of the army and hailed as Alexander's successors, as the men of the future.

There had been a significant change in the army after the losses in the desert. Alexander had put outstanding members of the Iranian families, conspicuous for their birth, into the units of the Companion Cavalry, even into the inner Royal Squadron. One of the horse squadrons was almost entirely non-Greek.

This unsettled the Macedonian foot soldier, much more resistant to change. The Shield Bearers were deeply skeptical.

Rumbling had begun.

At the same time, from Susa, Alexander may even have received ambassadors and envoys reporting on the state of the Greek city commanders.

In Alexander's absence, there had been a war begun by the Spartan king. Antipater had been sent with troops to supervise the common safety and had put down the war, but undoubtedly there had been further turmoil in the cities of the Peloponnese. Individuals had been exiled and already there was a pool of Greeks outside the polis who had been exiled from their homes.

Alexander was to announce and have sent back to Greece for reading at the end of July 324 a famous order that restored the Greek exiles to their home cities. Why he did this has been highly disputed.

On one view, he had earlier supervised the disbanding of the mercenary Greek armies being retained by some of the satraps in his absence. So far as can be seen, however, many of the mercenaries just congregated to find a new employer. But this does not seem to be what Alexander was addressing.

It seems likely that he felt that a social problem had arisen in Greece, and he had simply decided to tell the Greek cities that they must restore the exiles—the returning exiles would be a good source of continuing support for him inside the Greek cities. He was simply clearing up a problem and may not fully have thought out all the details.

When the order was read out in Olympia during the Olympic games of August 324, more than twenty thousand exiled Greeks had gathered to hear it, and it was received with jubilation.

But there were particular groups of Greeks who felt that they were made the victim and were losing out.

Exiles were not a new problem for Alexander. He had faced the problem of how to restore them and deal with them in Greek cities all down his march, when he liberated the cities of Asia Minor.

Unrest

Looking out on the changed face of the army, not liking the signs of the future they saw, Macedonian veterans had started to mutter and grumble. So Alexander marched from Susa in late summer 324 and announced at Opis that the old veterans, despite their marvelous service to him, were to go home. They were to be taken back under the command of Craterus, the most staunch and admired of the Macedonian generals. Craterus was to take over for Antipater, and Antipater was to go to court and meet Alexander, whom he hadn't seen for ten years.

This provoked immediate mutiny. The men did not want to go. They were not rebelling because Alexander had become a tyrant. They were rebelling against their own dismissal.

Alexander ordered the thirteen ring leaders to be arrested and executed and took refuge in his tent.

And then news spread through the camp. Alexander would be making new appointments—and all the new appointments were to be Iranians. The Macedonians realized that they were going to be bypassed and retired. Macedonians came to Alexander and begged to be forgiven. Afterwards, the Macedonians prepared to leave quietly. The veterans would return to their homeland, and Alexander promised that any children they had had in Persia would be brought up in Macedonian weaponry and returned to them.

Alexander celebrated with a famous banquet, the Banquet at Opis, to reassert harmony after this tremor in his entourage. He seated Macedonians around him and then in the next circle Persians, and then others in concentric circles, and he poured libations and praised the concord and partnership of rule between the Macedonians and Persians—harmony between the two, which had so nearly been endangered by his previous action.

Alexander's vision was of an army and court of the best. It was controversial, of course, but Alexander was trying to pull together the disparate units of the lands he had conquered into one common culture. The irony is that he had just deposed the rebellious Iranian satraps who were governing the provinces and mainly replaced them with Macedonians and Greeks.

It seemed as Alexander moved north during that summer as though the problems were on the whole fading. The impact of the exiles decree had caused the Athenians to petition him, because the Athenians for more than thirty-five years had been holding on to a settlement on the island of Samos, which they had peopled largely with Athenian settlers. The original land holders were in exile, and Philip had never disturbed this. So the question of returning the exiles was whether this would return what might be ten thousand Samians and thereby unsettle the Athenians on Samos.

In camp, Alexander announced that he was giving Samos back to the Samians. It was not necessarily unjust, but it was bound to cause trouble among the Athenians.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Where is the only place that one can be sure of standing in Alexander's footsteps?
2. How did Alexander deal with grumbling among his Macedonian veterans in 324?

Suggested Reading

Fox, Robin Lane. *Alexander the Great*. New York: Penguin, 2004 (1973).

Other Books of Interest

Stewart, Andrew. *Faces of Power: Alexander's Image and Hellenistic Politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

Lecture 13

The Cult of Alexander

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Robin Lane Fox's *Alexander the Great*.

In 324, Alexander had decided at Hamadan to restore Samos to the Samian Greek exiles and thereby dislodge the Athenian settlers. While Alexander was watching the games in Hamadan, news reached him that Hephaistion was ill in bed, and when Alexander arrived to see his friend, Hephaistion had died.

Alexander was distraught. His grief was said to have known no bounds, an Achilles whose beloved Patroclus had died.

Alexander sent envoys as far out as Egypt to the desert oracle of Ammon to ask whether it was fit to bestow Hephaistion with honors fit for a god. The envoys returned and said that Hephaistion must be honored as a hero, instead. Alexander, obedient to the gods, arranged heroic honors for Hephaistion.

© Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

A bronze portrait sculpture claimed by some to be of Hephaistion.

This raised questions about Alexander of divine honors and worship. On one view, Alexander himself was aiming to demand of his Greek subjects that he should receive honors as a god, or indeed, some have even argued that the roots of the divine delusion and urge to despotism were visible as early as 328 BC, back in the affair of *proskynesis*—though it seems reasonable based on the evidence that it was a social custom and in the context had nothing to do with divine worship.

Other historians have argued that Alexander wanted to be recognized as a god so he could force acceptance of the decree to restore the exiles to the Greek cities—but he did not need the status of a god to force the Greek cities to do what he wanted. If they disagreed, he would simply contact the Macedonian troops who occupied Greece to make certain that the city in question complied.

On the evidence, no demand for divine recognition was ever sent westwards by Alexander.

The Cult of Alexander

The cult of Alexander was indeed discussed in the democratic assembly in Athens by the public orators in winter 324–23, and it is easy to understand why: Athens risked losing a foothold of tremendous importance. There were, after all, perhaps ten thousand Athenian settlers on the island of Samos.

It is known that no cult of Alexander was ever established in the city, though one pro-Alexander orator did propose it.

The cult, as it sprung up, was likely offered variously by groups of supporters, either genuinely grateful or flattering him out of hope for future favor—or both. This was done at a local level, where they offered Alexander honors equal to those of the gods, and there was no need for an order from on high.

There are fragments from a letter the historian Theopompus sent from the island of Chios in the Aegean to Alexander about affairs in his absence. Theopompus complained about the behavior of Alexander's disloyal treasurer, who had lived with one of the top prostitutes in Athens. The woman had died and been divinized, a cult created in which she was equaled with Aphrodite. She had a sacred precinct, an alter, and divine honors he was paying to her.

Theopompus significantly added, "thereby insulting your [Alexander's] honors." The natural interpretation is that Theopompus was aware that other people at the time were honoring Alexander equally freely. The important thing is that the dating of the letter was before Hephaistion's death, maybe as early as 325 BC, before any exiles decree had been promulgated, or any of the attempts to locate a specific order for deification from Alexander had been circulated.

Alexander's successors in turn were given cults spontaneously at lower levels. Back in 334 BC, when Alexander first invaded Asia and liberated Greek cities, abolishing tribute, it seems likely some of the citizens spontaneously offered gifts equal to the gods to their liberator.

There has been found evidence that similar honors had been previously offered to King Philip.

There is a story that when Alexander was struck in the foot by an arrow during the entry into India, one onlooker saw the

Statue: © Mark Bishop/shutterstock.com/Musée du Louvre; Coin: © Clipart.com

Alexander as a Cult Figure

A statue of Alexander believed to be a copy of a cult statue from Alexandria, Egypt.

Inset: A coin minted after Alexander's Indian campaign depicts Alexander as Zeus.

wound and said the blood flowing was *ichor*, such as flowed in the veins of the gods. Alexander was said to have replied, "Nonsense, it's blood."

Alexander had no illusion that he was not mortal. It was one thing to believe one was a god on earth and quite another to believe what Alexander had come to think, that he was the special child of Zeus, a belief encouraged by Olympias, a belief encouraged in him at the oracle in Egypt.

But it was not a completely new event if Alexander in his lifetime received divine honors. Apart from Philip, Lysander had received, briefly, divine honors from the political oligarchs he had forcefully installed on the Greek island of Samos, where he had a festival instituted in his name.

So in context it can be seen that honors equal to the gods might be given as part of a festival named after a king or ruler who had given something great to a people, not as part of an accompanying belief that that king or ruler would never die.

The Greek world was characterized by a belief in many gods. The hallmarks of honor were libations, the paying of incense, the pouring of wine, or the offering of animal victims whose meat was distributed to worshipers.

This was the sort of honor that would be conducted for Alexander in thanks and gratitude for what he had done or in hope of favor, which was why the cult had been discussed already in Athens in 324 BC.

So there was a political dimension to it. But the key notion is that the king as benefactor was the source of good deeds and would be both thanked and encouraged to give again.

There was in Greece a wide range of separate statuses: gods, demigods, heroes, and mortals, and Alexander was integrated as a recipient of honors equal to the gods—with that hint in Theopompus that some people may already have been honoring him as Alexander-Zeus. It is known that Alexander's court artist painted Alexander holding a thunderbolt, linking him to Zeus, but it is difficult to be sure whether he was under Zeus's protection or was Zeus's equal.

There is a difference between the cults of Hephaistion and Alexander: Hephaistion's was strictly after his death.

Alexander wrote a letter to a misbehaving governor in Egypt saying he would forgive him all the many crimes the man had committed if he would advance honors and shrines for Hephaistion—a good indication of the importance to Alexander.

In recent excavations in Macedon has been discovered a telling inscription from Diogenes with a votive dedication to Hephaistion, so there were people who believed in Hephaistion's cult.

A Massive Undertaking

In the wake of Hephaistion's death, one of Alexander's plans was to conquer the Arabs in the Arabian peninsula. Aristobulus said Alexander remarked that he did not think himself unfit to be honored as a god if he brought freedom back to the Arabians and if they submitted to him beside their existing gods. It seems probable that Alexander enjoyed it, but did not demand it, and in the context of Greek culture, where there had been stirrings of it before, it became a natural reaction to the greatest king in ancient history.

Alexander planned to send explorers round the Arabian peninsula, intent on a combined naval and land operation—despite the ill-fated march through Makran. The expedition would progress down the east coast of the Arabian peninsula, round the rich kingdoms in the south, and back up the west side until hitting the Red Sea and returning to Egypt.

It would be a massive undertaking.

Alexander also reflected that the Persian Gulf could (depending on one's translation of the Greek) be made prosperous or be made to continue being prosperous.

Alexander had sent one of his officers to the Phoenician cities either to buy people for slaves or to settle them in cities along the Red Sea, colonizing the region in the hope that it would be prosperous too.

There is the impression that the Macedonians were looking at Asia as a land that could be developed.

Alexander sailed down the rivers Tigris and Euphrates in early 323, where on the Tigris—believing them defenses of some sort—he destroyed mechanisms that may have been used to regulate the flow of the rivers.

When Alexander went to Babylon he was met by a delegation of astrologers who told him not to enter the city from a certain angle. He was thought to have attended to this warning but then, for various reasons—some said he was encouraged by his companions—he seems to have overridden the astrologers' advice.

Alexander dispatched adventurous sea captains to explore the Caspian Sea in the north to check whether that was an independent lake or a gulf of the outer ocean.

In May 323, Alexander returned and, after a drinking party, collapsed into a serious fever and for the next two weeks weakened progressively, until one evening in June 323, thirty-two years old, Alexander joined Hephaistion in death.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Was there precedent for a living ruler receiving gifts equal to the gods?
2. What expedition had Alexander planned before his death?

Suggested Reading

Fox, Robin Lane. *Alexander the Great*. New York: Penguin, 2004 (1973).

Other Books of Interest

Bosworth, A.B. *From Arrian to Alexander: Studies in Historical Interpretation*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2000.

Lecture 14

Death and Beyond

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Robin Lane Fox's *Alexander the Great*, chapters 32 and 33.

There is an account of Alexander in his final years, written by Ephippus, which claimed that Alexander wore the sacred clothes of the gods, even dressed with the horns of Ammon—that he would sprinkle the floor of his palace with precious scent and sweet-smelling wines, that incense was burned for his enjoyment.

Ephippus said that in his last days Alexander was melancholy and ill-tempered. Ephippus was well informed about some of the details, but it is hard to tell how much he can be trusted, and much of it could be exaggeration.

Was He Poisoned?

In the last weeks of his reign, Alexander had abandoned his throne and gone away. A man passed the guards unobserved and sat on Alexander's throne. This so alarmed the eunuchs looking in that they tore their garments and began weeping, saying it was a bad omen. When Alexander consulted the omen interpreters, they said it was a very bad sign, indeed—and Alexander had the man put to death to avert the ill fate.

The question has arisen among historians: In all the feasting and dining, was there a secret attempt to get Alexander out of the light? Did they poison him?

Ephippus wrote a history in which he described Alexander toasting all the guests and slumping back after a drinking challenge. There is also an account from an authoress, Nicobule, who wrote that Alexander recited a scene from Euripides's *Andromeda*, and after toasting twenty guests, Alexander went into a decline.

A story in the Vulgate claimed that Alexander was entertained by a known courtier, Medius, a Greek, and then drank from the "cup of Heracles" and collapsed.

By far the fullest account is in both Arrian's and Plutarch's *Life*, in which they quote an enigmatic source, the Royal Diaries, which are independently ascribed to Eumenes, Alexander's Greek secretary, and Diodotus, who could even be associated with the viceroy in Macedon.

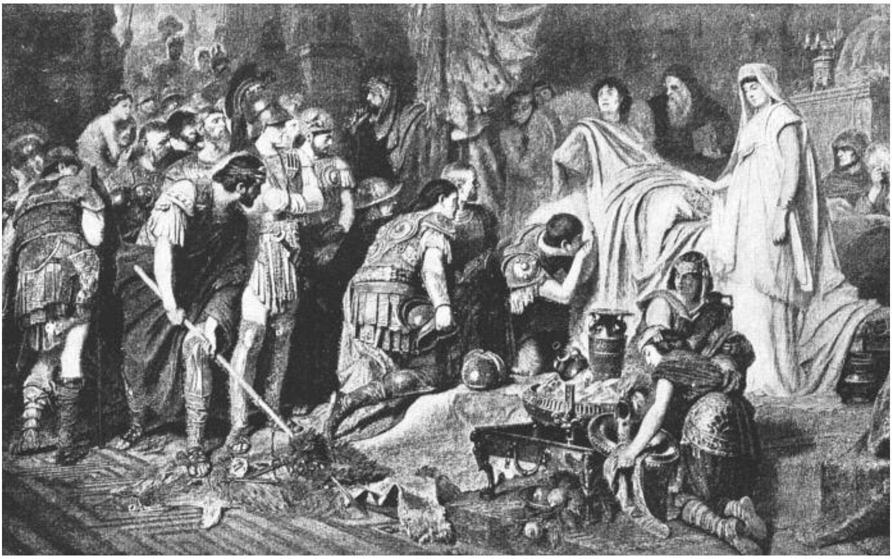
The Diaries give a meticulous day-by-day account that may be a medical case-book history. It is as if this was the official bulletin of Alexander's decline. It has him drinking, then catching a fever, avowing to sleep in the house where he'd been entertained at the party, being moved around Babylon with various companions, and over a period of nearly a fortnight, eventually drifting away. At last there was a riot in the courtyard and the officers were unable to prevent his Macedonian troops, who believed Alexander's death was being kept from them, from breaking down the door and processing past Alexander's bed, weeping for the king.

But the question remains about the status of the Royal Diaries. It has been theorized as a response to the controversy surrounding Alexander's death—implicitly a rebuttal to the contrary rumors that some rival or other had poisoned Alexander.

Eumenes and Diodotus may not even have been the real authors. It is possible that Cassander or one of the Aristotelians—implicated in Alexander's death—compiled an apparently knowing, intimate account of Alexander's last days, implying in fact that the king died on a long, slow pattern and thereby excluding the charge of poison.

The majority of scholars would class the Diaries not as a gospel-truth version, but as a tendentious pamphlet designed to rebut the poison charge. It is clear that on correct translation, neither Ptolemy, Alexander's best friend, writing as late as the 280s BC, nor Aristobulus, writing in the 290s, ever used the Diaries. If the Diaries were genuine, then surely they would have been used.

Aristobulus claimed that Alexander had a fever and that he started to drink to abate the fever.



Public Domain

Engraving of the *Death of Alexander the Great* after the painting by Karl von Piloty, 1886.

The party tradition was strong. It seems likely that Alexander went to a party, drank, and afterwards fell ill. There were attempts later to issue sensational pamphlets listing the very guests who had been at the party, whose names were said to have been suppressed by historians, but again, these lists are hard to decipher, the tradition is late, and it seems to be sensationalism.

The decisive point is that there was at least a two-week gap between the memorable fatal party and the death date attested independently by the chance survival of the Babylonian day-by-day diaries. This long gap of a fortnight seems a strong argument that poison had not been involved. One would think that a poisoner would have given Alexander something so strong as to kill him on the spot. And the general consensus is that the ancients were not aware of slow-acting poisons.

Alexander was the only person of any note who died in this phase, so it was not an epidemic. One possibility is that he contracted malaria in his journeys in the marshes around the Tigris and Euphrates.

Alexander's death was a thunderbolt, completely unexpected. Sometimes historians write as if Alexander was to blame for leaving no heir, but there was no reason for him to think that he was going to die at thirty-two.

The End of the Line

Strife broke out among Alexander's officers, and there was nearly a civil war. Various rebels and opposition groups within Babylon in the next ten days were thrown to their deaths. What emerged was a compromise, that Alexander's brother by one of Philip's former marriages, the half-witted Philip Arrhidaeus, would share the throne with Roxane's unborn child. The child turned out to be a boy and was duly named Alexander IV.

Meanwhile, there were regents, and these two kings, who actually accorded much respect both in Asia and Macedon, continued, until Philip Arrhidaeus was murdered by the returning Olympias, in 317, and then after Olympias herself had been killed, Cassander killed off Roxane's child, probably in 311–10. Cassander also had killed the second child of Alexander, long forgotten, the child he had fathered with Barsine.

By 310, Alexander's line was extinct—and perhaps the longest-lasting member of it was one of his sisters.

Alexander had been exploring the Caspian Sea in the north, checking out where the outer ocean lay. After Arabia, Alexander's thoughts might have been for westward conquest—west through Egypt and into Lybia, Carthage, and surely he would want to reach the Pillars of Heracles (the Straits of Gibraltar), and there he would have believed he had reached the outer ocean in the west. He might then have returned back, possibly along the coast of Spain.

Would he have gone down into Italy? Might he even have seen off the Romans?

Would Alexander have returned to see the person he had not been directly in contact with since 334 BC, his mother Olympias?

No one can know.

But it must be recognized that he had the supreme fighting force. One of his veterans was worth two or even three hundred untrained soldiers, as emerged from the battles after Alexander's death.

These battles pitted various successor officers against one another until eventually in 306 BC the lines began to form. Ptolemy founded the lines of the Ptolemies and pharaohs in Egypt, and Seleucus, commander of the Shield Bearers, ended up as the dominant monarch in Asia. The Seleucid royal family would continue in Asia for another one hundred and sixty years or so, until crippled by the rise of Rome—much as the Ptolemies eventually would be.

In Greece, above all, after murdering Olympias, predominated first Cassander and his children and then a second line, which involved the family of Antigonus. Again, Macedonian power would persist until toppled by the Romans after the fatal battle of Pydna and the loss of the kingdom in the 160s.

Alexander's conquests were split and areas given away during the course of the struggle, but there was no concerted national uprising against the Macedonians, even when they were warring amongst themselves. What was found instead was that Alexander's former satraps or commanders could enlist Iranians, Armenians, Persians even, by the ten thousand, to serve in armies in which one Macedonian was fighting another. There was no coordinated uprising in Asia to throw them out. It makes one wonder how widely the old ruling dynasty of the Persian kings had really been appreciated.

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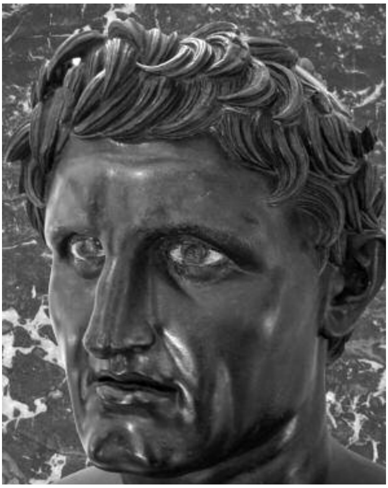
A marble bust of Ptolemy I Soter ("savior") dating from the third century BC. Identification was based upon coin effigies.

Ptolemy I was a Macedonian general under Alexander the Great who became ruler of Egypt (323–283 BC) and founded the Ptolemaic Kingdom and the Ptolemaic Dynasty.



© Massimo Finizio/National Archaeological Museum of Naples, Italy

A bronze Roman copy of a bust of Seleucus I Nicator ("victor") from a Greek original discovered at Herculaneum. Seleucus I Nicator was also a Macedonian officer in Alexander's army. He established the Seleucid dynasty and the Seleucid Empire in Asia.

Alexander's Plans

A few days after Alexander's death, it was claimed that Alexander's notes, or his plans, had been discovered by the first of the regents, Perdiccas, who claimed to have received Alexander's ring in Alexander's lifetime, making him a successor. It cannot be known whether this was true—the associates of Perdiccas certainly maintained it.

Perdiccas had the plans read out to the army, hoping that in the form they were presented they would be rejected by the troops—and they made stunning reading: westward conquest through Lybia, Carthage, the Pillars of Heracles; various enormous shrines to be built, a pyramid for Philip that would be larger than the biggest pyramid, and a series of other building schemes; and the most extraordinary plan of all, the transfer of persons between Europe and Asia so that by intermarriage and by acts of common kinship they should be brought into close harmony and intimacy.

Was this really Alexander's plan? On balance, it seems likely that what Perdiccas read out was an inflated version of the notes he had found, it being important for them to be aired and rejected by the troops so that no successor could subsequently be held to have betrayed Alexander's last plans and wishes. They needed to be taken out of the air and killed off. Such is a bold interpretation of Perdiccas's motives, but it seems to be along the right lines.

The plans had to seem plausible, and they must have rung eerily true after all the mass marriages, the incorporation of Asians into the army, the plans to hire Phoenicians and settle them along the Persian Gulf, and the founding of Alexandrias with mixed citizenry.

What was so distinctive about the following age of successor warfare is that though they certainly deployed Iranian and Armenian cavalry, they were in segregated units. There was not the same stress on inclusion or incorporation that had been Alexander's aim as a kingdom of the best, a vision far greater than could be sustained after the fragmentation that surrounded his death.

What is one to say of Alexander's explosive achievement? Alexander had the supreme spell of youth, the self-sustained rivalries with the great heroes in Homer's epic poems. He was ideally suited to the cut and thrust of the informal life amongst Macedonians, kings, and courtiers who were only as loyal as the prowess and achievement of the man who led them—and what a leader.

However hostile historians are they have to agree that Alexander was one of history's greatest commanders, and perhaps the greatest.

Alexander ran tremendous risks, and the march through Makran demonstrated the potential dark side of those risks. But one must look also at the success of every single one of the sieges, the balanced attack, the persistence, the eye for territory, the unbelievable nerve. One must look also at the stratagems, the repeated tricks, the methods used to unnerve, for instance, King Porus, in that amazing masterpiece of a battle in the teeth of a river crossing or against the line of war elephants in India.

Consider too the flexibility of Alexander's thinking and his deployment of troops, the arrangements for the reserve lines at Gaugamela, the concealments on the right wing, Alexander's rapid sense of what one could call the spacial geography of the battlefield. Alexander saw the available space. He realized the advantages and constraints of terrain, crucial to his deployment of the brilliantly trained, balanced standing army bequeathed to him by Philip.

There was also, of course, Alexander's personal, heroic leadership, entirely worthy of his own heroic self-image. He was absolutely unsparing in battle and afterwards, putting his own needs second, selfless before the demands of his men. Alexander was truly one of them. They knew that he had the luck of the devil. They only felt at ease when he led them. They adored him, and one can see perfectly well why. Alexander could be furious and passionate, but at the same time he could be impulsively generous.

Alexander was quintessentially open hearted. He was amazingly bold. The disbanding of the fleet, early on, was tremendously risky, but he pursued meticulously the strategy of capturing the land bases and eventually forcing the fleet to join him instead.

There was the delay in 331, at Tyre, where Alexander waited until Darius had gathered the biggest army he could so that the battle that followed—on the way to Alexander's ultimate aim already of reaching the eastern edge of the world—would be a decisive knock-out blow.

Above all was Alexander's unflinching nerve and determination.

Alexander's Achievements

Alexander's legacy on one side of history was the huge impact of his achievement on establishing the offering of cult and god-like honors to a living man. There had been stirrings before, but it was Alexander who established this as the gold standard against which subsequent rulers measured themselves.

Alexander was the only figure in ancient history, apart briefly for Julius Caesar, whose subsequent divinity was believed in by his men.

Amazingly, six years after Alexander's death, the Greek secretary could persuade Alexander's satraps to meet in a tent before Alexander's golden throne and deliberate as if in his unseen presence, having offered incense and made prayer to him, and they felt, as told by the historian Hieronymous, that they were being led on by a god. Alexander's divinity seemed real to these men.

Alexander's proposals to make the court and army multiethnic and inclusive, the court of the future, the rule of the best, harmony between the peoples who served with him in a Greek setting, using the Greek language, essentially died with him and his immediate successors. There were still old Macedonian conservatives who could not bear it.

It was Alexander who realized the Persians were actually quite agreeable, and it was Alexander's bond with his men, across differences of background, that still has a modern resonance.

Of course, Alexander was a model of ambition at an early age. No one would have believed that the Persian empire could have been overthrown.

On the other side, in Roman history, Caesar would claim, when he invaded Britain, that he had gone beyond even the outer ocean, but nobody pulled off what Alexander dreamt of in the East.

Alexander left a string of Alexandrias, certainly not less than fourteen, or perhaps even sixteen or more. The cities had a garrison function, but they were not just that; they were centers meant to grow and prosper and to be a tribute to the conquering king. And there was also the idea of what today would be called "development," of waking up the surrounding country.

Repeatedly Alexander noticed that the Indians were rather naïve about their natural resources. There was the feeling that Macedonian Greeks could make the most of Asia. This is not just the colonial theorizing of modern historians. The Macedonians were in a sense the first colonialists.

It is fitting to end these lectures with a quote from Homer:

"My friend, if by deserting from the war before us
You and I would be destined to live for ever, knowing no old age,
We would do it; I would not fight among the first;
I would not send you to the battle which brings glory to men.
But now as things are, when the ministers of death stand by us
In their thousands, which no man born to die can escape or even evade,
Let us go."

The fates of death still stand beside us, and maybe in a modern, post-Christian, post-Muslim world, glory of that personal kind is no longer so great, but it was great in Alexander's Macedonian setting.

Years after Alexander, Augustus, the founding emperor of Rome, visited Alexandria, and they asked what he would like to see. Not surprisingly, he wanted to see Alexander. Augustus then laid a crown of gold on Alexander's glass case and scattered flowers to pay his respects. They then asked Augustus if he would like to see the Ptolemies as well. Augustus replied, "My wish was to see a king, not corpses."

These lectures have hopefully provided an understanding of what Augustus meant.

The sarcophagus of Alexander the Great on display at the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul.

© Iaska Tilovini/Archaeological Museum, Istanbul

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What are possible purposes of the Royal Diaries?
2. What were Alexander's plans as read out to the troops by Perdiccas?

Suggested Reading

Fox, Robin Lane. *Alexander the Great*. New York: Penguin, 2004 (1973).

Other Books of Interest

Bosworth, A.B. *The Legacy of Alexander: Politics, Warfare and Propaganda under the Successors*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2005.

Grainger, John G. *Alexander the Great Failure: The Collapse of the Macedonian Empire*. London: Hambledon & London, 2009.